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Studying the Greek Military Dictatorship of 1967-1974

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“A GIFT FROM GOD”:
ANGLO–GREEK RELATIONS DURING THE DICTATORSHIP
OF THE GREEK COLONELS

Alexandros Nafpliotis

ABSTRACT: The focus of this article is an analysis of the Greek junta’s relations with the Wilson and Heath governments in the United Kingdom from 1967 to 1974. Emphasis is placed on diplomatic relations between the two traditional allies. The reactions of the military leaders of the regime in Athens and its representatives in Britain to policies pursued by London towards the establishment, consolidation and eventual demise of the colonels’ dictatorship are presented through the examination (for the first time) of official documents from both the UK and Greece. It is argued that the Greek military regime struggled to cultivate relations with Britain primarily for reasons of domestic and international prestige. Whereas Whitehall pursued a policy of “good working relations” with the junta in order to promote British interests *vis-à-vis* NATO, Cyprus and trade, the leadership in Athens was solely interested in using British support to gain legitimacy internationally and domestically.

“[...] εφόσον αμφότεροι χώροι παραμένουν πισταί εις ΝΑΤΟ και δυτικός προσανατολισμός
Ελλάδος δεν παύει αποτελεί βασικήν αρχήν πολιτικής, δι’ην Μεγάλη Βρεταννία
είχε πολεμική, Επανάστασις θα έδει να θεωρηται υπό Βρεταννικής Κυβερνήσεως
ως θείον δώρον.”

[...] since both countries are still loyal to NATO and Greece’s Western orientation
remains one of its basic political tenets, the Revolution should be considered by the British
Government as a gift from God.¹

I. Introduction

Although it has been more than 40 years since the collapse of the Greek colonels’ dictatorship, sober and well-documented analyses of the foreign policy of the regime have only recently started to appear.² The fact that the

¹ Greek Ambassador to London P. Verykios to Foreign Secretary George Brown, cited in the Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs [hereafter MFA]: London Embassy files [hereafter LE], 1967/2.4 part 1/2 no. 4941/ΣΤ/2-Α/1 Verykios to MFA, 12-9-1967.

² Sotiris Rizas, “Εξωτερική πολιτική και Κυπριακό” [Foreign policy and the Cyprus Question], in V. Karamanolakis (ed.), *Η στρατιωτική δικτατορία, 1967-1974* [The military dictatorship, 1967-1974], Athens 2010, pp. 115-128; Sotiris Walldén, *Παράταιροι εταίροι. Ελληνική δικτατορία, κομμουνιστικά καθεστώτα και Βαλκάνια, 1967-1974* [Unseemly partners: Greek dictatorship, communist regimes and the Balkans, 1967-1974], Athens 2009; Alexandros

investigation of the junta's relations with the superpowers (and especially the United States) is self-evident has left little room for the development of a literature around the colonels' foreign policy towards other important states which played a significant part within the general context of the Cold War, as well as the context of a regional political or military organization. The way the junta considered relations with a traditional ally who had had a seminal role in Greek politics since the creation of the Greek State, and who was a prominent member of NATO and (since 1973) the European Economic Community, is of particular importance.

The Slippery Road to Dictatorship

In the 1960s, relations between London and Athens were still in the long shadow of the Cyprus Question. During the early 1960s, however, the Anglo-Greek connection suffered primarily because of London's unwillingness to commit to NATO funding to Greece. This stance was anchored to the belief that Britain did not have particularly vital strategic interests in Greece (in relation to Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey)³ and Whitehall's realization of its constantly shrinking economic capabilities.⁴ Harold Wilson's election as prime minister coincided with George Papandreou's brief stint at the helm

Nafpliotis, "Οι αετοί, το λιοντάρι, το σφυροδρέπανο και ο φοίνικας. Οι εξωτερικές σχέσεις της Ελλάδας αμέσως πριν και κατά τη διάρκεια της δικτατορίας των συνταγματαρχών" [The eagles, the lion, the hammer and sickle and the phoenix: Greece's foreign relations immediately before and during the colonels' dictatorship], *Μνήμων* 33 (2014), pp. 257-264, and *id.*, "The 1971 Reestablishment of Diplomatic Relations between Greece and Albania: Cooperation and Strategic Partnership within Cold War Bipolarity?", in O. Anastasakis, D. Bechev and N. Vrousalis (eds), *Greece in the Balkans: Memory, Conflict and Exchange*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 118-134. See also the slightly older works on the subject: Sotiris Rizas, *Οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες, η δικτατορία των συνταγματαρχών και το Κυπριακό ζήτημα, 1967-1974* [The United States, the dictatorship of the colonels and the Cyprus Question, 1967-1974], Athens 2002, and Vassilis Pasmazoglou, "Ελληνική δικτατορία (1967-1974) και ΕΟΚ. Οικονομία, πολιτική, ιδεολογία" [The Greek dictatorship (1967-1974) and the EEC: Economics, politics, ideology], in G. Athanasatou *et al.*, *Η δικτατορία, 1967-1974. Πολιτικές πρακτικές - ιδεολογικός λόγος - αντίσταση* [The dictatorship, 1967-1974: Politics - ideology - resistance], Athens 1999, pp. 92-114.

³ See, for example, references in William Mallinson's books, *Cyprus: Diplomatic History and the Clash of Theory in International Relations*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010, p. 96, and *Britain and Cyprus: Key Themes and Documents since World War II*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011, p. 23.

⁴ Sotiris Rizas, *Η Ελλάδα, οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες και η Ευρώπη, 1961-1964* [Greece, the US and Europe, 1961-1964], Athens: Patakis, 2001 pp. 102-103.

of Greek politics. The seminal events of July 1965 and the subsequent (three failed) endeavours for the formation of a government in Athens were viewed with great interest and anxiety in Britain.⁵ More specifically, during the crisis of 1965, the British ambassador, Sir Ralph Murray, condemned Papandreou's actions and London (not ignoring British and Greek royal ties) seemed to be clearly taking King Constantine's side. British fears were not palliated even after Papandreou's fall, as Stephanos Stephanopoulos' government was considered fragile, but relations ameliorated considerably in 1966 with the Greek foreign minister expressing the view that they were now more cordial than ever since 1945.⁶

It was as early as the beginning of that year that British diplomats were discussing the possibility of a right-wing coup taking place in Greece.⁷ Foreign Office (FO, or FCO after 1968) officials were struck by the equanimity with which Greeks regarded that possibility, and, although they had no recent indications that a coup was imminent, they were eager to ascertain the stance of two traditionally important factors in Greek postwar politics: a) what was the position of the US Embassy and local CIA staff *vis-à-vis* right-wing elements in Greece, as well as the general policy to be followed by the US; and b) whether King Constantine remained resolutely opposed to an extra-parliamentary solution.⁸ As a memorandum produced for a meeting of Wilson with Constantine reveals, an "extra-parliamentary solution" initiated

⁵ For a sober discussion of the July 1965 events and the lead-up to the junta, see J. Μεγναυδ, *Οι πολιτικές δυνάμεις στην Ελλάδα* [The political forces in Greece], Vol. II, Athens: Savvalas, 2002, and especially pp. 72-210. For a protagonist's take on events, see Andreas Papandreou's account and especially his reference to the British being "openly hostile" to him and his father in the immediate pre-coup period (*Η Δημοκρατία στο απόσπασμα* [Democracy at gunpoint], Athens 2006, p. 362).

⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom [hereafter NA]: Foreign Office files [hereafter FO, or FCO after 1968], 371/185666 Record of conversation, George Thompson and Ioannis Toumbas, 12-9-1966.

⁷ The British ambassador had reported something along those lines on 19 February, and a "strong likelihood of a right-wing coup" had also been identified by two British MPs who had visited Greece in May 1966 (NA: FO 371/185677/CE1631/6 Letter, H. A. F. Hohler, FO to Murray, Athens, 27-6-1966). What is more, Washington had received information reports on a Greek military conspiratorial group as early as March 1966 (Field Information Report, Athens, December 20, 1966, cited in James E. Miller (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Vol. XVI, Washington, DC, 2000, document 245); it is hard to believe, given the degree of cooperation between the two allies, that the Americans had not informed the British of this valuable piece of information.

⁸ FO 371/185677/CE1631/6 Letter, Hohler to Murray, 27-6-1966.

by the right but opposed by the king, who was nonetheless under considerable pressure from his immediate entourage to yield, was considered a possible reaction to a feared victory of the Centre Union in future elections.⁹ As for the leader of the opposition, he appeared to have been persuaded by the king that the coup plotters would not dare move without royal assent and that the latter was not forthcoming.¹⁰

The memorandum made clear that it was in the British government's interests that there should be a strong and stable Greek government able to maintain the status quo on four main issues: Cyprus, Greek participation in NATO, British commercial interests and the containment of the communist threat in Greece. London, although secretly aware that a resounding victory of George (and Andreas) Papandreou would have been "worrying for us" as it "might well have led to anarchy in Greece and at least a disturbing weakening of Greece's membership of the NATO alliance", did not play any role in easing the junta's ascent to power; the final conclusion reached by the British diplomat who authored the memorandum was that, "a continuation of the present, albeit delicate, political situation in Greece seems preferable".¹¹

By the end of the year, though, circumstances had changed in Greece. King Constantine (also under the stress created by the revelations surrounding the ASPIDA affair and Andreas Papandreou's alleged involvement in that) no longer seemed willing to avoid any kind of "deviation from the political order", fearing that the Centre Union leader's firebrand son would shake the very foundations of Greece's postwar political establishment, by posing a challenge to three basic pillars: the special role of the monarchy, the country's devotion to the Western Alliance and the protracted political isolation of the communist left.¹² Andreas' fall out with his father over a pact with conservative leader Panayotis Kanellopoulos, coupled with the younger Papandreou's fiery rhetoric against the US, the palace and Greek élites, served as a catalyst for fanning the flames of Greece's already turbulent politics.

In the spring of 1967, Ioannis Paraskevopoulos' government collapsed, and an interim government to take the country to elections in May was formed under Kanellopoulos. The latter, when asked by US ambassador to Athens Phillips Talbot about his reaction to a possible Centre Union victory,

⁹ NA: Prime Minister files [hereafter PREM], 13/2139 Memorandum on the Greek political situation, 8-11-1966.

¹⁰ Stan Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou: The Making of a Greek Democrat and Political Maverick*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012, p. 202.

¹¹ PREM 13/2139 Memorandum on the Greek political situation, 8-11-1966.

¹² Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou*, pp. 208-226.

declared that, “the Greek nation would never be delivered to the communists or to Andreas Papandreou. It would be saved for real democracy.”¹³ Only two days before, though, the serving Greek prime minister had sent a circular to Greek embassies around the world, castigating reports in the international press about alleged “dictatorial tendencies” and “deviation intent” in Greece, and asking representatives of the Greek State abroad to react strongly against similar instances in the future.¹⁴

II. Establishment

1967

Two weeks later, the imposition of a military dictatorship of lower-ranking officials in Athens was a fact. The British Embassy was in a much more apt position to judge developments in Athens than other European embassies, given its good level of contacts and expertise.¹⁵ The first dispatches from the embassy in Athens to the FO after that date are quite revealing of the extent that Britain was aware of a putsch conceived by lower-rank officers. Although Sir Ralph Murray confessed that he knew that “a group of extremist officers decided in January to go underground and organise military measures to solve the political problem”, information was more than blurry and he held that “the plotters [were] unrepresentative and that their measures [were] inexpert and [might] not be sustained for very long”.¹⁶ Quite indicative of the lack of foreknowledge of the coup by the British Embassy was the following telegram from Murray: the British ambassador wrote to London that he had no information whether General Georgios Zoitakis and Brigadier Stylianos

¹³ Telegram number [hereafter tel. no.] 4569 from Athens, 7-4-1967, cited in Miller (ed.), *Foreign Relations*, Vol. XVI, document 268.

¹⁴ LE 1967/2.4 part 2/2 no. Y01-49, Kanellopoulos to MFA, 5-4-1967.

¹⁵ The Swiss ambassador, for example, had to rely on the British in order to notify Bern about the coup as communications at his embassy had broken down (Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland, *Junte militaire en Grèce*, 381.0, Étienne Bourgnon, Athens, to Willy Spühler, Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, 23-4-1967). Interestingly enough, though, while Bourgnon reported that his German, French, Israeli, Yugoslav and Japanese colleagues were surprised by the coup, no such mention was made by the British ambassador – even though the two embassies were in close cooperation, as stated above.

¹⁶ FCO 9/124 Murray to FO, tel. no. 275, 21-4-1967. A month later he conceded that he “became aware in January of a Colonel Papadopoulos plotting, having declared that the time for military action had come” (FCO 9/126 Memorandum on Coup in Greece, Murray to Brown, 23-5-1967).

Pattakos were also active in the coup.¹⁷ It was only much later that afternoon that Murray managed to gather more detailed information on the actual perpetrators.¹⁸ It appears then that Whitehall was not anticipating a military overthrow of the government of this kind.

The first serious consideration of London's policy towards Greece following the coup came as an immediate response to a change of the political situation in a country considered for many years a traditional ally. Only a week after the tanks had filled the roads of Athens, Prime Minister Wilson suggested to Foreign Secretary George Brown that they should be thinking how to strengthen the opposition to the regime and to give support to the king, thus securing "the return of a non-Communist constitutional government before resistance [became] an exclusively Communist prerogative". Brown, in his reply, declared that developments in Greece were of major importance for two main reasons: first, because of Greece's key position in NATO and in the Mediterranean, and secondly because of Cyprus.¹⁹ The foreign secretary, however, distinguished his views from Wilson's, saying that overt assistance to the king and, indeed, any political meddling would be inexpedient, as it would lead the colonels into further isolation and harden their stance. He therefore introduced what was to become the unofficial doctrine of the FO in relation to Greece for at least the next three years: that cautious and measured cooperation would modify the regime.²⁰ As far as the king was concerned, the decision, taken after consultation with Dean Rusk, the US Secretary of State, was that he was to be supported fully but unobtrusively. The British government, however, remained perplexed in its effort to maintain a balanced attitude towards the fledgling military junta and its old friends in Greece.

In his attempt to draw a successful policy, the foreign secretary wished to gain access to first-hand information regarding both the general attitude of the

¹⁷ FCO 9/124 Murray to FO, tel. no. 276, 21-4-1967.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, tel. no. 284, 21-4-1967, and tel. no. 295, 22-4-1967.

¹⁹ PREM 13/2140 Minute by H. Wilson, 1-5-67.

²⁰ On this, compare also the judgement of the West German ambassador to Athens on the military regime: "[Despite the violation of legality,] it cannot be denied that the attempt to eliminate the communist threat, whether imminent or latent, was, in principle, in the interest of the Western alliance as well as in accordance with our specific German interests." (Cited in "Botschafter Schlitter, Athen, an das Auswärtige Amt", no. 177, Schlitter to Bonn, 20-5-1967, in Ilse Dorothee Pautsch, Jürgen Klöckler and Harald Rosenbach, 1967. *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Berlin and Boston: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013. Retrieved 14 November 2014, from <http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/223143>).

colonels and the state of public opinion in Greece. He therefore regularly asked the British ambassador in Athens for an up-to-date evaluation of the political and social situation. The first major instance of such coordination of views occurred a few days after the *coup d'état* and resulted in Sir Ralph Murray's advice of "do[ing] business with the regime and try[ing] to push them into a suitable political evolution".²¹ The ambassador's recommendation to proceed with a normal working relationship on the spot was coupled with the possibility of using the strength of feeling in Britain about the coup as one way of pushing the colonels in the right direction. Brown commented that, "that could be combined with a certain aloofness, for example in having no British Ministers visit Greece [...] until the regime had evolved into something more respectable".²²

Meanwhile, in Athens, the regime had already started to show its credentials: the Greek Central Intelligence Agency (KYP) informed all Greek embassies that a multiplication of the illegal activities of the Greek Communist Party was expected and sent them "request for information lists" that had to do with communist activities. In other words, the Greek Embassy in London (along with others around Europe) was turned into a spying office in the service of the dictatorship, and communist sympathisers, such as the Ambatielos,²³ were closely monitored.²⁴ The colonels were, however, able to get support (be it tacit or active) for their so-called "Revolution" from a variety of sources, amongst whom was Labour MP Francis Noel-Baker.

International Developments

Subsequent international and domestic incidents worked in favour of the colonels. The Six-Day War, the outbreak of which came less than 50 days after the coup in Greece, played a significant role in allaying the fears of

²¹ PREM 13/2140 Record of a meeting between the Foreign Secretary and H.M. Ambassador, Athens, 3-5-67.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Tony Ambatielos was the leader of a communist-led maritime union who had found refuge in Britain and married Betty Bartlett, a significant figure of the British communist movement. Betty Ambatielos became a prominent figure of the opposition to the colonels, with the Greek Embassy identifying her as a narrator for an "incredibly anti-Greek" documentary on Greece aired on ITV in December 1967 (LE 1967/2.1 part 2/2 no. 1283/Φ.4, Roussen, London to Prime Minister's office, 12-12-1967).

²⁴ LE 1967/2.4 part 1/2 no. Θ-804926, Chatzipetros, KYP to MFA, 29-5-1967. On this, see also the revelations that came to light after the fall of the junta, "Άνθρωποι της χούντας κατασκόπευαν τους Έλληνες φοιτητές στην Ευρώπη" [Junta's men were spying on Greek students in Europe], *Ριζοσπάστης* (26 September 1974).

especially Western, US and NATO, officials.²⁵ The “widespread concern” that the Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, on 31 May had admitted that all members of the NATO Alliance felt, soon changed to predilection towards the junta, due to their upgraded status as the only tried-and-true Western ally in the wider region apart from Israel.²⁶ As a consequence, the issue of the Cyprus dispute also became a matter of priority for the Western Alliance, which made efforts, especially through the British, to persuade the two parties (i.e. Greece and Turkey at the time) to take bolder steps towards a peaceful settlement. While war in the Middle East was raging, Noel-Baker, quite characteristically, wrote to the Greek foreign minister to say that he was “very much distressed by the bad image Greece continue[d] to be given by [the British] press, and the unfortunate impressions that have gained ground in political circles [in Britain]”. The British Labour politician even went on to request a meeting with Prime Minister Konstantinos Kollias and Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos, in order to “make certain specific suggestions about publicity and public relations, and also about possible visits to Greece by political and other British personalities”.²⁷ It should be said that was not the first time that Noel-Baker chose to offer his services to the Greek government; he had also done so in connection with Cyprus and Greek-Turkish talks over the fate of the island in the summer of 1966, causing alarm in FO officials and especially the British ambassador in Athens, who thought that it was “not the time for private diplomacy which might indeed mess things up”.²⁸

Given this background, it is understandable why it was imperative for London to establish a rapport with the representative of the Greek government in London. After a small hiatus, Panayotis Verykios succeeded Demetrios Nicolareisis²⁹ and was immediately received by Brown (a fact Verykios considered particularly flattering). The foreign secretary asked his interlocutor to convey the message that Britain’s position would be much easier if the

²⁵ On the Mediterranean during the Cold War and détente, see Effie G. H. Pedaliu, “Fault Lines in the Post-War Mediterranean and the ‘Birth of Southern Europe’, 1945-1979: An Overview”, in E. Calandri, D. Caviglia and A. Varsori (eds), *Detente in Cold War Europe: Politics and Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 15-31.

²⁶ FCO 9/148 Oral answer from Mr Healey to Mr Gardner, 31-5-1967.

²⁷ LE 1967/2.4 part 1/2 Francis Noel-Baker to Paul Economou-Gouras, MFA, 6-6-1967.

²⁸ FO 371/185677 Ralph Murray, Athens, to Sir Paul Gore-Booth, FC, 16-7-1966.

²⁹ See “Μεταθέσεις και τοποθετήσεις πρεσβευτών εις τας κυριωτέρας ελληνικὰς πρεσβείας” [Ambassadorial transfers and positions in major Greek embassies], *Μακεδονία* (10 January 1967), and “State Intelligence”, *The London Gazette*, no. 44444 (3 November 1967).

junta avoided further arrests, released political prisoners and re-established a parliamentary democracy, only to receive a strongly worded reply by the Greek ambassador: Verykios stated that, since both countries were in NATO and Greece's Western orientation remained one of its basic tenets, the junta should be considered by London as a "gift from God" ("[...] Επανάσταση θα έδει να θεωρήται υπό Βρεταννικής Κυβερνήσεως ως θεϊόν δώρον" in the original). The final conclusion of the Greek diplomat was that Brown was primarily anxious lest Greek domestic developments cause the British government any trouble.³⁰ This way, the Greek ambassador conveyed to Athens what the Labour government considered a major obstacle to having proper relations with a right-wing military regime; that is, mostly parliamentary and public opinion pressure to condemn a military dictatorship in another European country – especially at a time when Whitehall was facing severe criticism, following the impetus of the demonstrations against the Vietnam War.³¹ Notwithstanding this, what also became apparent from the meeting was that Verykios was not going to be a very good channel of communication with the Greek government, for he was considered to stand to the right of the colonels.³²

Party Conference and Street Demonstrations

Reactions to the imposition of a dictatorship in Greece came to a head in early October when the Labour Party Conference at Scarborough passed a resolution asking for the expulsion of Greece from such European organizations as the Council of Europe until the military dictatorship gave way to viable and proper democracy.³³ The Greek government responded through the newspaper that was expressing its views, *Ελεύθερος Κόσμος*, which claimed that some members of the Labour Party were influenced by communist propaganda and had, wittingly or unwittingly, assisted the Soviet State in the past and were now doing so again. The article concluded by suggesting that, "the British people were sensitive about democracy, but they should confine their sensitivity to their own country".³⁴ As a result, and under subsequent pressure from Athens, the British (Labour) government

³⁰ LE 1967/2.4 part 1/2 no. 4941/ΣΤ/2-A/1 Verykios to MFA, 12-9-1967.

³¹ Alexandros Nafpliotis, *Britain and the Colonels*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012, p. 18.

³² FCO 9/228 "View of the new Greek Ambassador to London", Davidson to Dodson, n.d.

³³ LE 1967/3.3 part 1/2 The Labour Party Annual Conference 1967, Agenda page 72, "Greece" (Composite Resolution), n.d.

³⁴ Cited in FCO 9/148 Sir Michael Stewart to FO, tel. no. 28, 17-10-1967.

decided to ignore the resolution of the conference. This was perfectly in line with the general ambience for, as Woodhouse has argued, “throughout the dictatorship it was the various vehicles of public opinion rather than the executive authorities that sustained the resistance” to military rule.³⁵

Only a few days later, though, the Greek ambassador was forced to report to Athens that a group of 20 Brits (“mostly thugs”) had demonstrated outside the embassy with pickets that read “Save democracy in Greece”.³⁶ Verykios assured the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the event was of particularly minor importance, but a series of similar events followed in early November with demonstrators (after failing to approach the US Embassy nearby) throwing white paint at the embassy door and later removing the embassy’s sign from the entrance.³⁷ The ambassador complained to the FO and personally to its permanent under-secretary about the British police’s negligence to perform their duty.³⁸ Sir Paul Gore-Booth deplored the incident and promised to conduct an investigation to guarantee that something like that would not happen again.³⁹

The Greek ambassador in London was more successful when it came to the argument he used in order to persuade Whitehall to cultivate a “good working relationship” with Athens; namely, Greece’s geopolitical significance in the context of the Cold War. As Verykios told Lord Hood (responsible for NATO at the FO):

Since military preparedness, as history and the very existence of NATO have proven, is the most effective deterrent of war, countries whose geographical position is of great strategic importance should be greatly valued. For, ignoring this principle serves the expansionist aims of the West’s enemies and has catastrophic consequences. [...] I hope that our allies in NATO, and especially Turkey, whose isolation would be complete in case Greece fell to the communist camp, will constantly keep in mind the importance of the Greek factor.⁴⁰

³⁵ C. M. Woodhouse, *The Rise and Fall of the Greek Colonels*, London: Granada, 1985, p. 40.

³⁶ LE 1967/2.1 part 1/2 no. 5798/ΣΤ/2 Verykios to MFA, 16-10-1967.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 6215/ΣΤ/2 Verykios to MFA, 4-11-1967.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 6278/ΣΤ/2 Verykios to MFA, 6-11-1967.

³⁹ *Ibid.* It should be noted here that, at the time, another similar incident was the subject of correspondence between the FO and the Home Office: a group of demonstrators had broken into the Greek Embassy exactly a week after the *coup d’état*. A young Brit was sentenced to six months in prison, causing the reaction of the Home Secretary, who thought that was severe and thus asked the FO whether he could release him immediately. FO officials replied saying that “[b]reaking the immunity of diplomatic premises is an activity we all deplore [...] this view should not be affected by the nature of the government in question” (FCO 9/225 Speaking notes, attached to Davidson to Maitland, 21-12-1967).

⁴⁰ LE 1967/2.1 part 1/2 no. 6550/ΣΤ/2 Verykios to MFA, 17-11-1967.

III. Consolidation

The King Takes Action

Less than a month later, nevertheless, King Constantine instigated an abortive counter-coup, the upshot of which was that the king fled to Rome and the colonels tightened their grip on the country.⁴¹ London seemed to be completely unaware of the counter-coup and had difficulty even identifying what had triggered off the king's action.⁴² This, though, does not appear to be the whole truth. The Labour government, accused of a "royal fixation", was thought of as "see[ing] the King, with the support of the Right, as the medium for a return from dictatorship".⁴³ Furthermore, as correspondence between the embassy in Athens and the Foreign Office reveals, London was warned about the possibility of a counter-coup well in advance. The British appraisal of the post-coup situation, as far as the disavowal of any immediate reaction to the colonels' military takeover was concerned, proved to be correct. However, on 21 September, the FO did not pay much attention to "a reliable British source whose confidence must be respected" who was personally informed (albeit "in rather vague and ill-thought terms") by King Constantine about the latter's "ordering the General commanding Larissa District to stage a counter coup".⁴⁴ According to the British ambassador's assessment of the situation one month later, the king would not "willingly risk attempting to overthrow [the colonels] in favour of bringing back some political personality, even supposing that his chances of succeeding in such a move were greater than [at the time] they appear[ed] to be".⁴⁵

It seems, nevertheless, that the king's fascination had ceased to appeal to British officials, who held that he had lost "his traditional role as a stabilising factor in national life" by then.⁴⁶ As a consequence, and lest the British find themselves "in the middle of a Greek political storm" without helping in the restoration of democracy in the country, Sir Michael Stewart recommended against providing support to Constantine.⁴⁷ In addition, London had been informed (less than a month before the actual counter-coup) that the king was "*certainly not ready* for a direct confrontation with the Colonels yet, whether

⁴¹ "Junta in Greece Firmly in Power after Coup Fails", *The New York Times* (15 December 1967).

⁴² FCO 9/139 Speaking notes on Cabinet meeting on Greece, 14-12-1967.

⁴³ "Greek Pressure Points", *The Guardian* (26 September 1967).

⁴⁴ FCO 9/120 Sir Michael Stewart to FO, tel. no. 1007, 21-9-1967.

⁴⁵ FCO 9/120 Memorandum on "The Greek Internal Scene", Stewart to Brown, 19-10-1967.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ FCO 9/120 Letter, Sir Michael Stewart to Sir Paul Gore-Booth, 24-10-1967.

by bringing the Army in or otherwise” [emphasis added].⁴⁸ The files of the archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveal that Sir John G. S. Beith expressed the hope that an agreement for Constantine’s quick return would be reached, admitting that this would ease the work of Greece’s friends and increase the prestige of the regime abroad.⁴⁹ Consultations with other NATO allies (the French, the West Germans and, most importantly, the Americans), in the light, however, of the anxiety “lest the junta began to feel that [it] could exist without [Britain]” and, consequently, become “less inclined in the future to pay heed to what [London said]”,⁵⁰ led to the postponement of recognition until after the New Year.⁵¹ After the failure of the counter-coup, a “window of opportunity” of resisting the colonels seemed to close, with reactions to the establishment of a dictatorship fading as a consequence of the junta’s consolidation and a series of successive events in the wider region of Eastern Europe and the Middle East: most significantly the Six-Day War of 1967, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as the removal of allied bases from Libya, and anti-American demonstrations in Italy and Turkey in the last quarter of 1969.⁵² Finally, criticism that the British government was condoning military rule by dealing with the new government grew and grew, only to be countered with the expression of the familiar point that “dealing with a government is not the same thing as approving it”.⁵³ This declaration marked the beginning of a series of demarcations that distinguished between adopting a tough stance towards the junta, primarily for public consumption, and fully cooperating with them. The reasons that led London to take that approach in relation to the military dictatorship were not inconspicuous to the Greeks. In January 1968, Britain’s financial anaemia was making headlines even in Athens, where journalists were arguing that the country was turning into “little” Britain and were wondering whether “God would save England”.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ FCO 9/120 Letter, Sir Michael Stewart to Sir John G. S. Beith, 17-11-1967.

⁴⁹ LE/1967/2.1 part 1/2 Verykios to MFA, no. 8071/ST/2, 30-12-1967.

⁵⁰ FCO 9/139 Sir Michael Stewart to FO, tel. no. 1406, 20-12-1967.

⁵¹ See also “Western Powers Rebuff Greek Bid for Recognition”, *The New York Times* (16 December 1967).

⁵² C. Svolopoulos, *Η ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική, 1945-1981* [Greek foreign policy, 1945-1981], Athens 2001, p. 169.

⁵³ FCO 9/132, tel. no. 102, 30-1-1968.

⁵⁴ “Αυτοκρατορία τέλος” [The end of empire], *Εμπρός* (20 January 1968). See also “Το Ρέκβιεμ μιας υπερδυνάμεως” [The requiem of a superpower], *Μακεδονία* (28 January 1968).

1968

The second year of the colonels seemed to have started as they had wished: they had consolidated their power domestically after King Constantine “delivered his people into [their] hands”,⁵⁵ and they had resumed normal diplomatic relations with all their neighbours and the major powers. Having said that, when Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart saw the Greek ambassador, he did make an effort to express Whitehall’s desire to see democracy restored in Greece. Verykios said he assumed that “the colonels were men of honour and [would] carry out this pledge to provide a constitution”. However, what worried Stewart and starkly exemplified the difference in mentality between the Greek and the British was Verykios’ final comment: “[The] Colonels, he sa[id], claim they are honest men, *unlike politicians*.” The British foreign secretary replied by saying: “[...] I distrust these blanket attacks on politicians – if politicians are swept away what is left but armed force?”⁵⁶ It is worth noting that, despite the imposition of the dictatorship, British Embassy officials (like officials from other Western embassies) still managed to be in close contact with a number of Greek politicians who provided them with valuable information.⁵⁷

Events, however, were to take a slightly different turn and international developments again played a significant role. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in late August to counter the impending reforms of the Prague Spring, and the increased fear of a continuing communist threat which this engendered, emphasized in Greece by Soviet naval activity in the Mediterranean, led to a further reconsideration of Britain’s policy towards the colonels.⁵⁸ A month after Warsaw Pact tanks entered Prague, FCO officials thought that it would be helpful if Manlio Brosio, the General Secretary of NATO, spoke to the Greek foreign minister about the situation in the country.⁵⁹ Lord Hood, however, the following day said that there were certain reasons that made the FCO hesitant. These were: 1) the fact that there was to

⁵⁵ FCO 9/838 “Annual review for 1968”, Sir Michael Stewart, 10-1-1969.

⁵⁶ John W. Young, “The Diary of Michael Stewart as British Foreign Secretary, April-May 1968”, *Contemporary British History* 19/4 (2005), p. 488.

⁵⁷ Ioannis Varvitsiotis, *Όπως τα έζησα, 1961-1981* [The way I experienced events, 1961-1981], Athens 2012, p. 200.

⁵⁸ FCO 9/870 Memorandum for the Secretary of State’s meeting with Sir Michael Stewart, 7-11-1968. See also C. Svolopoulos (ed.), *Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής. Αρχείο, γεγονότα και κείμενα* [Constantinos Karamanlis: Archive, facts and texts], Vol. VI, Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1995, p. 80.

⁵⁹ FCO 9/166 Memorandum on Greece and NATO by Davidson, 17-9-1968.

be a referendum in Greece by the end of the month and London would like to see its result before it took action; 2) the American attitude, which was then favourable to the colonels; and 3) the attitude of other NATO powers.⁶⁰ Three days later, the under-secretary for foreign affairs responsible for international organizations within the FCO met the Greek ambassador to discuss the Greek Question in the Council of Europe (CoE). Lord Hood assured Verykios that his government was opposed to the expulsion of Greece and that it would make an effort to avoid any discussion on the issue on a governmental level; if that were to fail, London would try to “bury” the issue at the Council of Ministers, which, in any case, was not scheduled to meet before the following May.⁶¹ It is interesting to note here, furthermore, that at this stage, British officials were opposed to a voluntary Greek withdrawal from the CoE, with Lord Hood describing it as a “mistake” that would provide the “enemies” of the regime the opportunity to claim a victory. The principal reasons given for this were: “a) because ‘LES ABSENTS ONT TOUJOURS TORT’ and b) because it would be equal to a public acknowledgment of their alleged guilt and their inability to defend their views”.⁶²

Events in Eastern Europe played a significant part, as the war in the Middle East had one year before, in Western perceptions of the Greek dictatorship. The junta was increasingly being seen in a much more favourable light, as it once more appeared to be a geostrategically important NATO stronghold. The affirmations of the colonels about their uncompromising allegiance to the Western Alliance were greeted in the West as a much-sought-after reassurance in the face of “communist danger”. Britain, in particular, wanting to assert its proximity to American views, could not assume the role of leader in a motion unpleasant to the regime in Athens. Therefore, even the idea of having Brosio discussing human rights issues with members of the junta was not painstakingly followed. As a result of that, and in conjunction with the result of the referendum on the Greek constitution, the colonels, bolstered by the greater emphasis being put on NATO military preparedness in the wake of the Czechoslovakian crisis, toughened their stance and, especially, their resistance to pressure from their allies on Greek internal matters.

⁶⁰ FCO 9/166 Letter from Hood to Sir Bernard Burrows, 18-12-1968.

⁶¹ LE/1969/5.1 part 1 no. 7153/ST/2 Verykios to MFA, 21-12-1968.

⁶² *Ibid.*

1969

At the beginning of 1969, the British government was still trying to keep the ambiguous attitude that it had assumed *vis-à-vis* the Greek junta from the beginning of establishing relations.⁶³ Consequently, in the light of the discussion in the CoE concerning Greece, which was stimulated by a joint motion by delegates from the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, Britain decided neither to take the lead in Greece's suspension nor to oppose it. The British ambassador, Sir Michael Stewart, implied that this decision "might be unheroic but it was correct in the circumstances".⁶⁴ The state of Anglo-Greek relations at the time, especially at such an important junction as the formulation of a "make or break" decision in London concerning the CoE, was really precarious and it illustrated the divisions and the power struggles within both governments, as far as the thorny issue of relations between the two old allies was concerned.

Panayotis Pipinellis, an extremely experienced and capable diplomat and politician, spent most of his days as Greek foreign minister swerving round the inconsistencies and the anti-Western rhetoric of the Athens military regime, and trying to mollify Greece's most significant allies by promising constitutional and other policy reforms that most of the time were unacceptable in the eyes of the colonels who were then at the helm of Greece. In this particular instance, Pipinellis, in a private talk he had with the British ambassador, indirectly asked that Whitehall should use its "good offices to help to secure a neutral recommendation from the Assembly", so that the Greek delegation would not walk out and "ipso facto shut the door on any further enquiry into the torture allegations" that the sub-committee of the Commission of Human Rights was going to examine in a visit to Greece in February.⁶⁵ Stewart seemed to have been of the same mind as his Greek counterpart and so went on to suggest to FCO ministers to inform the members of the British delegation on the advantages of a milder course of action.⁶⁶

Moreover, Lord Chalfont, British minister responsible for Greek affairs, rejected reports that his country was against suspension because a large arms deal was being negotiated at the time and stressed that British delegates were "entirely free to vote according to their consciences".⁶⁷ The Greek

⁶³ Woodhouse, *The Rise and Fall of the Greek Colonels*, p. 69.

⁶⁴ FCO 9/871 Record of a meeting on Greece by N. J. Barrington, 17-2-1969.

⁶⁵ FCO 9/845 Letter by Sir Michael Stewart in Athens to Edmonds at FCO, 21-1-1969.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ "Verdict on Greece", *The Guardian* (27 January 1969).

Embassy, however, immediately agreed with *The Times* that Britain “would in fact oppose any such recommendation, largely because of the importance of Greece as a member of NATO’s eastern flank”, with Verykios writing to Athens that his personal impression was that Whitehall would do “anything possible, without, though, exposing itself completely, to undermine any such move”.⁶⁸ Most delegates disassociated the Greek regime’s moral standing, as it was demonstrated in its human rights record, from the security it provided within the NATO framework and emphasized their decision by noting that none of the other European dictatorships (that is, Spain and Portugal) was a member of the Council.⁶⁹ However, the British realized that, if there was a strong movement for suspension among other governments, it would be difficult for them to oppose it, also in view of parliamentary pressure. Therefore, on 28 November 1969, the British ambassador called on the Greek foreign minister to say that Whitehall believed that the best solution would be for the Greeks to withdraw from the CoE.⁷⁰

The above issue caused trouble for British officials for a considerable amount of time, as it was linked both to the colonels’ threat to leave NATO as a consequence of Greece’s expulsion from the CoE and to Britain’s commercial interests. Chancellor of the Exchequer Roy Jenkins took the line that Britain “should not suffer economically purely in order to take a resolute, moral stand”,⁷¹ a position vindicated by the foreign secretary, although the amount of trade at stake with Greece was then not very large.⁷² Wilson’s decision to “sacrifice” Greece’s presence in a political organization of lesser significance was designed to function as a “safety valve” for the automatic release of parliamentary and public opinion pressure when the temperature on the Greek case exceeded the limits.⁷³

Correspondence between FCO officials and the British Embassy in Athens, as well as documents circulating in Whitehall, suggest that the British government’s main objective was to maintain good working relations with the colonels, in order to influence them regarding, first and foremost, Britain’s national interests, but also, admittedly to a lesser extent, with respect to Greece’s return to constitutional rule. A number of meetings between the Greek ambassador

⁶⁸ LE/1969/5.1 part 3 no. 521/ST/Z Verykios to MFA, 26-1-1969.

⁶⁹ “Strasbourg Vote for Greece’s Suspension”, *The Guardian* (31 January 1969).

⁷⁰ FCO 9/1192 “Annual review for 1969”, Sir Michael Stewart, 20-1-1970.

⁷¹ FCO 9/885 Record of a meeting on Greece, Barrington, 17-2-1969.

⁷² British exports were valued at £33.2 million a year in 1967 and £39.9 million in 1968 (FCO 9/892 Letter from G. A. Barry to J. M. O. Snodgrass, CRE 27683/G, 2-10-1969).

⁷³ On this issue, see Pasmazoglu, “Ελληνική δικτατορία και ΕΟΚ”, p. 105.

SPECIAL HANDLING SEE ORDER BOOK CHAPTER III	CONFIDENTIAL	SECRETARY OF STATE TO 3-2-69	RETURN File
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OPD(69) 3		ARCH. 13	Copy No. 10
24 January, 1969		6863/5482	
CABINET			
DEFENCE AND OVERSEAS POLICY COMMITTEE			
GREECE			
<u>Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs</u>			
<p>At their meeting on 1 August, 1968, the DOP Committee invited the Defence Secretary, in conjunction with the Foreign Secretary and the President of the Board of Trade, to prepare a report on the situation in Greece, with particular reference to the prospects for the sale of certain large items of military equipment. We have delayed the present report, on which the President of the Board of Trade has been consulted only on the commercial aspects, as there have been no developments on the sale of frigates and patrol boats, or indeed other matters, which would entail early decisions.</p>			
<p>2. In his Memorandum to the Committee of 2 July, 1968, the Foreign Secretary stated our four main policy objectives in Greece to be:</p>			
<p>(i) to promote a return to constitutional rule and democratic liberties and conditions of stability;</p>			
<p>(ii) to preserve, so far as possible, the military effectiveness of Greece as a NATO ally;</p>			
<p>(iii) to protect British subjects and interests generally, and in particular to pursue our commercial interests;</p>			
<p>(iv) to retain our ability to influence the Greek Government in matters of foreign policy, for example, Cyprus.</p>			
<p>3. In pursuing these objectives our policy has been to do nothing which would imply approval of the régime's policy; to seek to influence the régime by private and direct approaches to Greek ministers rather than by public protests or action against Greece in international organisations; and, in considering requests for the supply of military equipment, not to supply weapons and material which could help the present government to repress any opposition within Greece.</p>			
- 1 -			

Fig. 1. Britain's four main objectives *vis-à-vis* Greece, laid down by Foreign Secretary Sir Michael Stewart.

The memorandum became the most seminal and oft-quoted document on Greece within the Foreign Office during the junta's reign.

Source: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office files, 9/870 OPD (69) 3 Memorandum, 24-1-1969.

and FCO ministers illustrate this point clearly. In the long meeting between the Greek representative and Stewart, the latter took advantage of the occasion to express his dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Greece. He said it was very difficult for British public opinion and parliament to forgive the suspension of democratic rule in the Mediterranean country, and, that, consequently, that had to be Whitehall's view, as well. Moving on to the CoE question, Stewart made clear that London had not been actively involved yet and added that the junta's arguments and timetable were not cogent; the only persuasive point, which could block Greece's expulsion, would be the announcement of an election date. The foreign secretary said that since the Greek government had decided to fight in the CoE, Britain's position was extremely difficult. After the spring summit there was no more time to be bought and the walls were closing in, as even larger countries, like Britain or France (over Suez) and the US (over Vietnam), had to take into consideration public opinion and advice or pressure from other friends or allies.⁷⁴ It should be noted here that Stewart spoke on the same lines with the US under-secretary, warning him that "if no action were taken against Greece in December opinion in the UK would feel more outraged at the colonels and that this would have a damaging effect on NATO".⁷⁵

The new Greek ambassador to London, Ioannis A. Sorokos, responded by saying that the junta expected London's understanding and real and responsible support, as "the theory of democracy is easy; what is difficult is its real implementation". On the CoE, he said that Greece could not believe that a responsible British government would subscribe to such frivolous thoughts. "On the contrary," he added, "we expect [Britain] to pursue a responsible policy and to influence other countries as well to take into account European unity and the goodwill of Greek people." The junta was not going to schedule elections because "it could not succumb to pressure even from its closer friends, and, primarily, because it needed to prepare the country for true democracy". The ambassador's report on the meeting closed with him informing Athens about Stewart's "complete disagreement" with the Greek government and his intention to concur in Greece's expulsion.⁷⁶

By the end of the year, the wave of dissatisfaction created in most European capitals by the regime's repellent treatment of the population reached prodigious dimensions, as, at the end of November, a secret report compiled by the Commission of Human Rights that condemned the colonels' "disregard for

⁷⁴ LE/1970/4.4 no. 6532/ST/2 I. A. Sorokos, London to MFA, 18-10-1969.

⁷⁵ National Archives, Washington, DC [hereafter NARA], RG 59: POL 23-9 Elliot L. Richardson, London, to Rogers, D.C., tel. no. 9187, 8-11-1969.

⁷⁶ LE/1970/4.4 no. 6532/ST/2 Sorokos to MFA, 18-10-1969.

the rule of law and its practice of torture and imprisonment without trial” was leaked to the press.⁷⁷ That fact, in conjunction with America’s unwillingness to press the British over Greece, resulted in Wilson’s announcement, on 9 December, that his government would vote for expulsion:

I informed the House that in default of a sudden change of heart by the Greek Government, expressed in a short and specific time-table relating to the restoration both of democracy and human rights, Her Majesty’s Government’s representative had been instructed to vote for the suspension of Greece from membership of the Council.⁷⁸

The British government’s vote for the expulsion of Greece from the CoE steered Anglo-Greek relations once more towards an impasse. The only politicians to escape the wrath of the junta were the Conservatives, and especially Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who had made a speech in the House of Commons on Greek membership of the CoE. In a letter to the British MP, Sorokos expressed his “deep satisfaction in realising, once more, that in your person we Greeks can find tangible proof of responsible comprehension in facing such a serious issue as is the actual Greek case”. He went on as follows: “It is so gratifying to feel, at present, that there are still leading political personalities in your great nation who continue to appreciate the mutual advantage deriving from the maintenance of friendly relations between our two countries.”⁷⁹

1970

1970 was to be quite different in many respects that again had to do with international developments, but, more importantly, with the situation in the interior of the two countries. The Greek colonels had managed to wrap themselves in the veil of a rather extensive political aloofness from the rest of Europe. The junta’s decision to withdraw from the Council of Europe in December 1969, in light of its imminent suspension, shut it off from most Scandinavian and Benelux countries, while some other Western European countries were forced to re-evaluate their policies towards Greece, albeit to a certain degree. In 1970, Britain’s diplomatic efforts were concentrated on limiting and repairing the damage to the Anglo-Greek connection caused at Strasbourg. London was again striving to adopt a twofold policy (not appear

⁷⁷ C. M. Woodhouse, *Modern Greece: A Short History*, London: Faber & Faber, 2000, p. 69.

⁷⁸ H. Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1971, p. 918.

⁷⁹ LE/1969/4.3 Letter from Sorokos to Douglas-Home, no. 2983, 10-12-1969.

to let the junta off too lightly *and* minimize a further regression of bilateral relations), thus following what a future British ambassador would (in 1973) call a “hot and cold policy”:

What I chiefly want to avoid is that we should drift [...] into a position where we are trying to combine being ostentatiously beastly to the Colonels in public with attempting to make drafts on their goodwill in private. The last Government tried this policy. It didn't work for them, and it wouldn't work for this one either.⁸⁰

The change in Whitehall to which the ambassador was referring occurred in June 1970, when the Wilson government's life ended, giving way to a Conservative restoration, which was expected also to affect Anglo-Greek relations. Domestic developments in both countries and the change in leadership these entailed, in conjunction with the alterations in the international and regional scenes, brought about the feeling that things were about to become different in many respects: “In the first place there was a new British government, in the second there had been Government changes of some significance in Greece,” as the Greek foreign minister was reported saying to the British ambassador.⁸¹ The unexpected defeat of Labour had as a consequence the arrival of new (and some not so new) people at the helm of British foreign policy; namely Edward Heath, the new PM, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, once again as foreign secretary (the previous time being in the early 1960s), and, to a certain extent, Lord Carrington, the new Secretary of Defence. Douglas-Home was a very well-respected figure, and his qualities were acknowledged by Heath, resulting in a good working relationship between the two of them;⁸² that is quite unlike the one between Wilson and Brown mainly in 1967-1968, a period of crisis in Anglo-Greek relations. As a direct consequence, the British government was in a better position to deal with international issues, such as relations with the Greek colonels' regime. Nevertheless, this did not mean that London was bound to provide stronger resistance to the colonels or push them more vehemently towards restoring democracy in Greece, as Douglas-Home's conservative credentials were known and universally proven in more than one instance.

⁸⁰ FCO 9/1714 Hooper to Goodison, 21-6-1973.

⁸¹ FCO 9/1193 Letter from Sir Michael Stewart, Athens, to Secondé, FCO, 7-7-1970. On the Greek government reshuffle, see “Specialists Added to Athens Cabinet”, *The New York Times* (29 June 1970).

⁸² A. Shlaim, P. Jones and K. Sainsbury, *British Foreign Secretaries since 1945*, London: David and Charles, 1977, pp. 152-155.

The election outcome caused high expectations in the Greek capital, as the colonels were expecting the new government to be more friendly, accommodating and cooperative than the Labour government, chiefly because of its nature and political orientation,⁸³ but also because of the emphasis it had chosen to put on NATO in its electoral manifesto. The Greek press comments on the elections are quite telling; note especially the leading article in the pro-government *Nέα Πολιτεία* that claimed that the British election results “show[ed] that the swing towards the left in Europe is being halted” and that these developments “vindicate[d] the 1967 Revolution [sic] and show[ed] that the Greek officers who launched it were the first to understand the message of [the] times”.⁸⁴

More importantly, though, the same newspaper, in a different article in the same edition, examined the attitude of leading Conservative politicians towards the Greece of the colonels *before* the election and commented that “the Conservatives had shown an *impeccable attitude* and had faced the Greek Revolution with *objective understanding*” [emphasis added]. The author of the article went so far as to state that Heath, as leader of the opposition, had, in private talks with Greek officials, “repeatedly offered to help smooth over misunderstandings, had expressed his understanding of the Greek problem and had accepted it as *sui generis*”. Finally, less vocal opposition among governmental circles was considered more likely: as David Bendall, a British official, told Sorokos, although the new government was not thinking of making “dramatic decisions” on Anglo-Greek relations, the fact that there was no left wing to create problems (as with Labour) could be seen as “an auspicious point”.⁸⁵

A severe blow, nevertheless, on the attempt to establish a better understanding between London and Athens came in the form of the death of Pipinellis (a seasoned diplomat and experienced politician who was particularly liked by the British), in July. Pipinellis was succeeded by Georgios Papadopoulos himself, which resulted in an automatic further accumulation of powers by the former colonel (he had relinquished his military title by then), who was already prime minister and minister of defence. This was not viewed in the most favourable light by the hardliners of the junta, and an internal crisis ensued during the “hot summer” of 1970.⁸⁶ The person who was chosen by Papadopoulos to assist

⁸³ The Greek foreign minister made “no attempt to conceal his pleasure at the election results in England” when he met Sir Michael Stewart (FCO 9/1193 Letter, Stewart to Secondé, 7-7-1970).

⁸⁴ “Κύριο άρθρο” [Editorial], *Nέα Πολιτεία* (21 June 1970).

⁸⁵ LE/1970/3.4 part 1/2 no. 3361/ST/20 Sorokos to MFA, 17-7-1970.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Carl Barkman, *Ambassador in Athens*, London: Merlin Press, 1989, pp. 32-34 and 43.

him in the conduct of foreign policy was Christos Xanthopoulos-Palamas, who was given the title under-secretary for foreign affairs. Xanthopoulos-Palamas, according to what Spyros Markezinis told the British, and with which Sir Michael Stewart concurred, “though able was totally amoral [...and] would try to quit at the first moment of serious trouble, but would in the meantime intrigue to strengthen and improve his position with Papadopoulos”.⁸⁷

This was the situation in the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1970 when the Eastern Mediterranean area turned, once again, into a “powder keg”. Events in Jordan, Egypt and Turkey contributed to a substantial change in Greece’s relations with the superpowers. The British were, once again, quick to affirm that “the South-East flank of NATO, where Greece occupies such a strategic position, is an area where we cannot afford any dislocation of the Alliance” and that “we should try to keep the Greek Government’s relations with NATO correct and good”.⁸⁸ As it were, the regional context presented the colonels with a serious advantage, and they moved sharply to exploit it in their relations with other countries. Sorokos answered Sir Thomas Brimelow’s concern over the very complicated and extremely dangerous situation in the Middle East by confirming the stability of Greece’s foreign policy and asserting its significance as a peace factor in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean areas.⁸⁹ On the British side, Stewart was one of the first to state that “at a time of increasing tension in the Middle East and of growing Soviet naval strength in the Mediterranean, [Greece’s] importance will [...] be thought to have increased”.⁹⁰

When the issue of the new ambassador to Athens was brought up in an FCO meeting, it was decided that the new British representative should deliver to Papadopoulos a message that would: “[...] lay emphasis on the importance [the British] attach[ed] to Greece’s membership of the Western Alliance, [their] anxiety to establish a good working relationship with the Greek Government and [their] determination to continue [their] support of the Greek Government’s efforts to promote a lasting settlement in Cyprus”. These three points would become the major objectives of UK policy towards Greece in the early 1970s, and action taken by the FCO would be measured against these basic aims. Quite importantly, the record states that “the difficulties created in Britain by the Greek Government’s continued

⁸⁷ FCO 9/1193 Powell-Jones to Snodgrass, 14-8-1970.

⁸⁸ FCO 9/1206 “Greece and NATO”, in Secretary of State’s talks with the Italians, 2-9-70.

⁸⁹ LE/1970/4.4 no. 4417/ST/2 Sorokos to MFA, 23-9-1970.

⁹⁰ FCO 9/1229 “Greece as a military ally” diplomatic report no. 441/70 by Sir Michael Stewart, 11-9-1970.

suspension of certain articles of the new Constitution *might also be mentioned but should not be over-emphasised*" [emphasis added].⁹¹

On the issue of arms sales to Greece, Sir Denis Greenhill (permanent under-secretary of state for foreign affairs) said that his country wished to do "as much business as possible with Greece". He added that "this could include the sale of arms and equipment that would enable Greece to carry out its NATO role" and he made specific reference to supplying ships for the Greek navy.⁹² The Greeks viewed this quite positively, for the additional reason that Athens was under the impression that London was not willing to sell it tanks, as was illustrated a few months before.⁹³ According to the British ambassador, Whitehall had rejected proposals then because the political climate had not been suitable, while now there was a change and a willingness to cooperate on the issue of arms sales.⁹⁴

One of the top items on the agenda was Cyprus, as "Palamas appeared quite eager that [the British] do something about [it]", to which he received a "duly qualified response".⁹⁵ In view of the situation on the island, that is with Archbishop Makarios following a constructive approach and the Turks' attitude changing for the worse (including pressure for a federal solution), according to Xanthopoulos-Palamas, the Greek official wondered whether the British "did not see it as in their interests to lend a hand in bringing matters to a successful solution".⁹⁶ Bendall, one of the British officials present at this exchange, interpreted that as an effort to get Britain to "lean on the Turks to make concessions".⁹⁷ He and Greenhill replied that London "had always thought it best to stand aside from the dispute" and that Britain would only contribute to a solution "if all the parties concerned wanted [its] help and advice", as it "did not intend in any way to impose [itself]".⁹⁸ Xanthopoulos-

⁹¹ FCO 9/1206 Notes on FCO meeting entitled "Policy towards Greece", 30-9-1970.

⁹² FCO 9/1233 Record of conversation between the permanent under-secretary and the Greek under-secretary for foreign affairs, 7-10-1970.

⁹³ LE/1972/4.1 no. 4700/ST/2 Sorokos to Armed Forces headquarters, Athens, 9-10-1970, and Sorokos to N. Broumas, Athens, 5-10-1970.

⁹⁴ LE/1972/4.1 Sorokos to Broumas, Athens, 5-10-1970.

⁹⁵ FCO 9/1233 Bendall, London, to Stewart, Athens, 9-10-1970. On how Xanthopoulos-Palamas' approach to Cyprus differed from that of Pipinellis, see Rizas, *Οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες*, pp. 88-90.

⁹⁶ FCO 9/1233 Record of conversation between the permanent under-secretary and the Greek under-secretary for foreign affairs, 7-10-1970.

⁹⁷ FCO 9/1233 Bendall to Stewart, 9-10-1970.

⁹⁸ FCO 9/1233 Record of conversation between the permanent under-secretary and the Greek under-secretary for foreign affairs, 7-10-1970.

Palamas insisted by arguing that what was required was a “*pragmatic approach to the problem, of the sort with which the name of Britain was associated*” [emphasis added] and that he thought that Archbishop Makarios would then be more prepared for Whitehall to be involved. Greenhill’s reaction was to say that “in the right circumstances, [the British government] would look carefully at a request for help”. The background notes shed some light on what this statement could have meant:

The Greek Government have previously mentioned that an initiative by us might be welcome if and when the talks reach an impasse. At that stage, a proposal by us for *the appointment of a “moderator” to assist the parties in the talks* might be well taken. But we would only wish to take such action if all sides wanted us to. Meanwhile, the idea is better kept to ourselves and in reserve. [emphasis added]⁹⁹

1971-1972

1971 marked the continuation of gradual British efforts to persuade Greeks in positions of responsibility to develop a better relationship with London after the tensions of 1967 and 1970. The most important events in that respect were the meeting between the Lord President of the Council, William Whitelaw, and Pattakos and the visits of Xanthopoulos-Palamas and General Odysseus Anghelis to London. The new British ambassador to Athens, Sir Robin Hooper, thought that the visits served as “a positive indication of goodwill” on Britain’s part, and that the last two events were “something of a landmark in the process”.¹⁰⁰ This period was also dominated by British fears of a takeover by young extremist officers (often collectively referred to as “Nasserites”) and their belief that, in the event of Papadopoulos falling from power, the most possible solution to the deadlock of dictatorship in Greece would be the Nasserites’ taking control.

Pattakos, deputy prime minister and minister of the interior at the time, lunched at the embassy on 3 June to meet the Lord President of the Council. Pattakos was confined in saying only that the main difference between the junta and the previous governments was that he and his colleagues “regarded the interests of the Greek people as paramount, and were not the tools of foreign powers or outside interests”. The true intentions of the ex-brigadier were more acutely revealed when he was asked when elections would be held in Greece; he answered that “he did not think the Greek people wanted

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ FCO 9/1514 “Annual review for 1971”, 31-12-1971.

elections” at the time, as he was convinced from his provincial tours that his government enjoyed “substantial popular support”. He went on to stress that “the continuing communist threat was an important factor”, but he added that he and his colleagues had no wish to stay in power indefinitely and had a plan for their eventual withdrawal. As regards Anglo-Greek relations, Pattakos, who described himself as an Anglophile, brought up the Cyprus Question and that gave Whitelaw the opportunity to “express appreciation of the present policy of the Greek Government over Cyprus, and their efforts to reach an understanding with Turkey”. The Greek minister replied by assuring his interlocutor that “Greece *would never be the first to use force*” [emphasis added]. According to the record of the meeting, the conversation concluded with a suggestion by Pattakos that Greece’s allies would have more effect on the Greek situation “by *persuasion than coercion*” [emphasis added].¹⁰¹

The Greek authorities were delighted with the meeting, but wondered why such meetings had to be treated as confidential. The colonels were aware of the British government’s wish to avoid controversy in parliament, but they also needed to show to the Greek public and the international community that were not treated like pariahs. As the Greek ambassador told Brimelow: “Athens would like contacts with this country [i.e. Britain] to be open.”¹⁰² Pattakos, in particular, sent a letter to Whitelaw to thank the British for the pleasant atmosphere and the constructive dialogue, but also to warn them of the adverse effect actions by UK-based resistance organizations would have on Anglo-Greek relations:

We are aware that *innate weaknesses of the British political system* afford opportunities on British territory for *impermissible attacks on Greece*. But we hope that your Government will in future see its interest in *preventing such attacks as far as possible*, since despite all the Greek Government’s efforts they have an unfavourable effect on our people’s attitude towards Britain. [emphasis added]¹⁰³

At that time relations between London and Athens were considered “satisfactory” by the British.¹⁰⁴ Exchanges and meetings between officials of the two governments had been intensified. One meeting between the Greek ambassador in London and Lord Carrington provided the occasion for a reiteration of the Conservatives’ policy towards the Greek colonels. The

¹⁰¹ FCO 9/1385 Hooper, Athens, to FCO, tel. no. 216, 4-6-1971.

¹⁰² FCO 9/1401 Brimelow to Hooper, 13-8-1971.

¹⁰³ FCO 9/1415 Letter from S. Pattakos to Lord President of the Council, 10-6-1971.

¹⁰⁴ FCO 9/1415 “Policy towards Greece”, FCO memorandum, 11-6-1971.

UK's objectives towards Greece remained the same four that the Labour government had outlined in 1968; with one significant difference, though. The three objectives, namely b) the preservation of the military effectiveness of Greece as a NATO ally, c) the protection of British subjects and British interests generally, and in particular Britain's commercial interests, and d) the preservation of the ability to influence the colonels in matters of foreign policy, and especially on Cyprus, were immutable. The objective mentioned first, however, that is, a) the promotion of the return to Greece of constitutional rule and full democratic liberties in conditions of stability, was, for the first time, qualified or rather downgraded.

The most striking development, however, would have to do with arms sales to Greece. The FCO speaking notes are revealing of the new attitude of the Conservative government towards that sensitive issue:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has agreed that our policy on arms sales to Greece should be adjusted in the direction of *a more positive effort to sell arms to Greece*. The Greeks were aware of our previous policy, under which we were prepared to allow the sale to Greece of arms for NATO purposes. *We now wish actively to promote such sales*, although we must still be cautious about the supply to Greece of arms that could be used against the civilian population, or are associated with this e.g. tanks. Lord Carrington will not of course wish to mention this latter aspect of our policy, but could be *encouraging about arms sales generally*. [emphasis added]¹⁰⁵

In Athens, Sorokos informed (member of the colonels' triumvirate) Nikolaos Makarezos about concerted British efforts to attract deals and added that those proved the British were "ardently" pursuing arms sales to Greece. The ambassador's suggestion was the following:

If and when the General Staff decides [...] that such and such an item of British materiel is good for us, it should not, for God's sake, tell anyone. It should be trusted to the government and given to the ministry of foreign affairs first, so that the ministry makes good use of it, politically and diplomatically. (No less than an unambiguous promise of a ministerial visit to Athens.)

The rationale behind this suggestion was that Sorokos thought that the British, perceiving the Greek intention, "would do anything possible both to secure the order through the salami method and to avoid giving a promise for a visit".¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ LE/1972/4.1 Letter from Sorokos to Makarezos, 21-3-1972.

The trigger that sparked the change of UK policy in relation to arms sales was economic in nature. The problematic state of the British economy and the urgent need for trade contracts to boost revenue was exerting its influence on the diplomatic field, which is traditionally vulnerable to this kind of pressure. In this particular instance the hard facts of reality became more obvious under the light of the power of competition: the failure of British firms to secure contracts in Greece, mainly attributed to the “Byzantine style of negotiations” of the Greeks and the primacy and advantage of the US over arms shipments to the country, was being extremely accentuated in the early 1970s. As far as Britain’s relations with the Greek armed forces were concerned, there was a considerable improvement, with the major factor being undoubtedly the decision to invite General Anghelis to visit London as the guest of the chief of the defence staff. The British were, nonetheless, not entirely satisfied solely with the cultivation of good inter-service relations. As Hooper wrote in his report: “naturally one would like to see it result in the purchase of British military equipment”.¹⁰⁷ Much to the dismay, though, of both the British ambassador and the defence attaché, Brigadier Baxter, who was hoping that UK suppliers could help the Greeks solve their problem of under-equipment, the prospects of arms sales to Greece remained “uncertain”.¹⁰⁸

There *was*, however, a rise in UK trade with Greece¹⁰⁹ as a result of two high-profile visits (one unofficial and one official) to Greece, this time: the first, by Lord Carrington, minister of defence, and the second by Lord Limerick, parliamentary under-secretary of state for trade and industry. The visits were instigated by Hooper, who thought that his country should do more in terms of increasing its influence on the government in Greece and expanding trade prospects and defence cooperation. The British ambassador to Athens was, though, instrumental in another change to London’s policy towards Greece. The FCO decided that concerns about the protection of human rights and the democratic nature of the Greek polity would have to be replaced by pragmatic considerations which mostly had to do with security (NATO) and financial (trade) matters:

¹⁰⁷ FCO 9/1530 Hooper to Douglas-Home, 2-3-1972.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ UK exports to Greece had reached a record high in 1971 and remained strong in 1972, and imports from Greece were considerably higher than from 1966 to 1968, but that was not interpreted in a larger share of the market of the country which was led by the military regime of the colonels (FCO 9/1520 Supplementary briefs to “Visit by Lord Limerick to Greece”, A. Brooke Turner, London, to Brimelow, London, 12-10-1972).

It had to be recognised that the retention at the top of the list of our policy objectives of the “promotion of the return to Greece of constitutional rule and democratic liberties in conditions of stability” had become inappropriate [...] We should beware of projects which could prove counter-productive by attracting damaging criticism [...] *Our objectives, and any change in them, are not made public in these terms.* We should still make clear in Parliament our hope that democracy would soon be restored in Greece. [...] We should continue to resist attempts by the Danes and Norwegians for action against Greece in NATO, and try to dissuade other NATO Governments from joining the Scandinavians’ campaign.¹¹⁰

Whitehall, therefore, opted for a more pro-active stance regarding Greece’s position in the Atlantic Alliance, offering its assistance to the colonels’ cause.¹¹¹ The new British policy was exemplified by the defence secretary’s “semi-official” visit to Greece in 1972. Lord Carrington’s talks with the Greek leaders enabled him to express recognition of Greece’s contribution to NATO and to make clear to Papadopoulos and Pattakos his government’s desire for good working relations.¹¹² According to the Dutch ambassador, this British move showed that the Conservatives were willing to go “a little further”, as economic considerations had “no doubt played a role”.¹¹³ Responding to reactions to his visit to Athens, Lord Carrington epitomized British foreign policy under the Conservatives towards Greece as follows:

It never seemed to me to be necessary that you should approve of the politics or the manner of a régime in order that you should have ordinary relations...So *this doesn’t seem to me to be really a very exceptional circumstance.* I also – and my country – happen to think that *Greece is a very important part of NATO* – and what happens in the South East of Europe and the survival of Greece and of Turkey is a matter of enormous substance to NATO, and therefore as Greece is a member of the NATO Alliance and so are we, *we must be friends.* [emphasis added]¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ FCO 9/1728 “Greece”, Record of office meeting in parliamentary under-secretary’s office, 11-2-1972.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² FCO 9/1533 Powell-Jones to Douglas-Home, 13-9-1972.

¹¹³ Barkman, *Ambassador in Athens*, p. 85.

¹¹⁴ FCO 9/1533 Text of Lord Carrington’s interview with the BBC, 16-10-1972.

1973

During this seminal year, a restructuring of policy towards the Greek regime was decided upon, although expectations did not change before the liberalizing measures taken by the Greek premier in the summer and the formation of the short-lived Markezinis government in the autumn. The naval mutiny, the subsequent abolition of the monarchy and the referendum all meant that London's dilemma of either promoting closer relations with the military regime with the risk of parliamentary criticism, or giving the colonels the cold shoulder and thus putting trade prospects in danger, now became more pronounced. Furthermore, 1973 was the year that Britain became a member of the European Economic Community. The colonels thought that it was thus an opportune time to once again try to twist Britain's hand over the EEC and other commercial matters. In this context, members of the junta, such as Makarezos, had earlier informed Western ambassadors that "the road to the ministry of National Economy ran through the ministry of Foreign Affairs".¹¹⁵ It was then agreed that it was "presentationally important" for London to help the colonels in Brussels and make clear to them that their troubles there were not of Britain's making. As part of this suggested *quid pro quo*, the British thought that, while remaining careful not to give empty promises, "it should nonetheless be possible to extract some advantage from such help as we might be able to give".¹¹⁶ More specifically, Hooper suggested a "helpful and sympathetic attitude" towards the Greeks and their problems, believing that this would safeguard British interests, including prospects of obtaining public sector contracts, and would "ensure that [Britain's] principal competitors (the French and Germans) do not have the advantage". He clarified his point further, leaving little doubt about Britain's policy on this sensitive subject: "[...] we should take full credit and extract what return we can whenever we speak up for the Greeks. We can support them on such matters as may arise within the Community affecting their interests but not impinging on important interests of other member states".¹¹⁷

A particularly important event of 1973 was the abortive naval coup, which was received in the British capital as "an amateurish and clumsy operation", involving only a small number of people, and being dealt with promptly and efficiently by the security services of the junta.¹¹⁸ Apart from

¹¹⁵ FCO 9/1731 Brooke Turner to Wiggin, 3-1-1973.

¹¹⁶ FCO 9/1732 Record of meeting on Greece, 4-4-1973.

¹¹⁷ FCO 9/1732 Hooper's comments attached to Goodison to Logan, 30-3-1973.

¹¹⁸ FCO 286/1456 Hooper to FCO, tel. no. 164, 24-5-1973.

its seminal repercussions within Greece, the attempted naval mutiny and the *Velos* incident were of considerable importance for London's relations with Athens, inasmuch as they were to be followed by a large British naval visit on 2 June. The upcoming visit was destined to expose Whitehall to criticism "from the usual quarters in London", who would argue that the traditional justification for maintaining a working relationship with the colonels (that is, Greece's efficiency and significance as a NATO member) no longer held good, as the reliability of the Greek navy would now be in doubt. Ambassador Hooper's suggestion was to go ahead with the visit as planned (as would also the Americans) for the following reason: "Cancellation would be a public declaration of no confidence, which would be deeply resented here (not only in government circles) and might affect not merely Anglo-Greek relations but also Greek relations with NATO."¹¹⁹

A New Era in Relations

The incidents of late May functioned as a cue for Papadopoulos to introduce new and unexpected political and constitutional developments that had been conceived some time before: the Greek monarchy was abolished and a presidential republic, with Papadopoulos as president, declared. A referendum on the constitutional issue was announced, and parliamentary elections were promised before the end of 1974,¹²⁰ since, according to Hooper, "an important motive in Papadopoulos' liberalisation strategy was to gain acceptance in Western Europe and a thaw in the implementation of the Association Agreement".¹²¹ All these announcements took place on 1 June 1973, a date that marked the starting-point of a new era in Anglo-Greek relations. During this period (which lasted until November), the British were fairly satisfied by political developments, including the assumption of the premiership by Markezinis, as well as the emphasis he chose to put on relations with the EEC, and Britain in particular. Furthermore, actions by the opposition regarding the regime and pressure by public opinion and the press in London were subdued. In light of new developments, Hooper advocated that British commercial interests and common concern over Cyprus (although London's position towards both was limited due to the United States' predominance) dictated a course of continuation of the

¹¹⁹ FCO 286/1456 Hooper to FCO, tel. no. 173, 29-5-1973.

¹²⁰ FCO 9/1732 "Abolition of the Greek monarchy", Hooper to Douglas-Home, 14-6-1973.

¹²¹ FCO 9/1998 "Annual review for 1973" diplomatic report no. 56/74, Hooper to Douglas-Home, 7-1-1974.

working relationship. Moreover, on the important issue of recognition, FCO official Alan Goodison said that Britain should use to its benefit the general impression given by the haste with which London acted (especially since Britain had recognized the republic deliberately on the day before the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Copenhagen): "It is generally understood that HMG were the first government formally to recognise the Greek Republic and, although this may be inaccurate seen under the magnifying glass of international lawyers, I see no reason why you should not make some play with the point if necessary."¹²²

The changes promoted by Papadopoulos were seen rather positively by the British Embassy in Athens, whose officials noted that, "however devious his motives, he ha[d] moved further in the direction of liberalisation than observers had thought possible". It was also suggested that Britain should promote its commercial and other interests by showing "qualified approval" of the formation of the new government.¹²³ The same spirit prevailed in the FCO, as well. The first reaction of the officials who were preparing an office meeting on Greece at that moment was to recommend Douglas-Home to "make generally encouraging noises" to the Greeks.¹²⁴ The most important development, nevertheless, had to do with British policy objectives towards Greece. The existing objectives would remain, but there would be a significant addition in the form of a specific objective; namely, "the need discreetly to *encourage progress towards democracy*" [emphasis added]. What functioned as a further catalyst for this were the changes in governmental faces in Greece; with such figures as Pattakos (who was not loved by the British) and Makarezos out of the picture, and the formation of a civilian political government by (Anglophile) Markezinis, things looked to be picking up for relations between London and Athens. Relations thus moved deeper into a new phase, which made the British feel "fairly satisfied" with the advent of a political figure they knew too well, and with the emphasis he placed from the start of his stint in power on Greece's link with Europe, and especially Britain.¹²⁵

Markezinis was initially viewed by London as worthy of its support. The British, like the USA and like other European countries, concluded that the Markezinis venture was "deserving of sympathy as affording a somewhat better prospect of a return to a measure of democracy than any of the likely

¹²² FCO 9/1714 Goodison to Hooper, 22-6-1973.

¹²³ FCO 9/1732 Denson to Goodison, 6-9-1973.

¹²⁴ FCO 9/1732 Hitch to Denson, 7-9-1973.

¹²⁵ LE/1973/3.7, "Annual review for 1973", 0445/1/AS90, Broumas to MFA, 14-1-1974.

alternatives”.¹²⁶ Whitehall, again after consultation with the embassies of other European countries, decided that it could “afford to be reasonably generous”; the upshot was the decision to send a “fairly encouraging” message to Markezinis from Heath.¹²⁷ Markezinis himself was gratified by Heath’s message and appeared keen on playing “the Britain card”. On his first meeting with Sir Robin Hooper, he expressed his desire to bring the two countries as close together as possible. The new Greek prime minister, though, was also interested in extracting significant (both symbolic and substantial) benefits from a closer relationship with London. The ambassador got the impression that Markezinis was “extremely anxious to get some major manifestation” of British approval for his return and that the British would most likely be pressed hard on this. Markezinis’ genuine admiration for Britain was not put into question but, as Hooper wrote, “the intention to use us as a counterweight is clearly at the back of his mind, and we shall have to be careful not to let him play us off against the Americans”.¹²⁸

The formation of the Markezinis government, though, sparked an internal FCO debate between Goodison (favouring a more encouraging and less cautious attitude towards Greece) and Hooper and his chancery (suggesting that Britain should stick firmly to the line that “the Greek government should be judged by its actions, not its promises”).¹²⁹ Discussion of this issue, however, was halted by a wave of student disturbances which took Athens by storm, culminating in the events of the Athens Polytechnic uprising and the army intervention to quell it on 16-17 November. According to the British ambassador, the army’s methods were “hardly in accordance” with British methods of controlling civil disturbance, as “the lack of proper riot equipment – ascribable at least in part to the West’s refusal to supply the Colonels with the means of repression – may, ironically enough, have left the military with no alternative to *cracking a nut with a steam hammer*” [emphasis added].¹³⁰ Douglas-Home said that the disturbances represented “a serious setback to the attempts that were being made to restore a greater

¹²⁶ FCO 9/1998 “Annual review for 1973” no. 56/74, Hooper to Douglas-Home, 7-1-1974.

¹²⁷ FCO 9/1716 Douglas-Home to Athens, tel. no. 263, 9-10-1973. See also Spyros Markezinis’ account in his *Σύγχρονη πολιτική ιστορία της Ελλάδος*, III: 1952-1975 [Contemporary political history of Greece, III: 1952-1975], Athens 1994, p. 185.

¹²⁸ FCO 9/1730 Hooper to Goodison, 16-10-1973.

¹²⁹ FCO 9/1733 Goodison to Wiggin, 1-11-1973.

¹³⁰ FCO 9/1717 “Praxicopematics: Or the fall of Papadopoulos” memorandum no. 516/73, Hooper to FCO, 6-12-1973.

measure of democracy”, and he noted that there would no doubt be renewed criticism of the Greek regime on the part of some members of NATO.¹³¹

After the army had restored order, on 25 November, “a swift, bloodless, and highly efficient” military *coup d'état* took place.¹³² Papadopoulos was deposed, with General Phaedon Gizikis¹³³ taking his place and Adamantios Androutsopoulos forming a government “of civilian mediocrities”. The British, however, did not fail to notice immediately that the man pulling the strings was none of the above. Brigadier Dimitrios Ioannidis (head of military police, to be known as “the invisible dictator”) was identified as the “somewhat shadowy figure” behind the new government.¹³⁴ Despite the nature of the regime, Hooper pushed for an early decision to recognize it, by alluding, once again, to Greece’s significance to NATO: “[...] to delay recognition overlong might provoke a reaction in a government the external political orientation of which is still not clear”.¹³⁵ Hooper was not alone in this: FCO officials referred to Britain’s first objective in its policy towards Greece to justify their opinion that there were grounds for early recognition and that it was “clearly desirable that [London] should recognise without unduly delaying”.¹³⁶ These suggestions were accepted by the government, which, after discussion at a cabinet meeting on the same day, decided to extend recognition to the Ioannidis regime on 4 December 1973, despite the new government’s lack of democratic credentials, making this the second fastest act of recognition of changes of governments through *coup d'états* in the period of the late 1960s to early 1970s.¹³⁷

The “business as usual” policy followed by the Conservatives was much appreciated by the junta; Christoyannis, a counsellor in the Greek Embassy, remarked that the Heath government was “more aware” than some others of the need to avoid pronouncements that could be taken as interfering in the internal affairs of Greece. The same official, when reminded about the British hope for restoration of democracy in Greece, informed his interlocutor that he felt optimistic about that “*in the long run* (with gloomy and significant

¹³¹ NA: CAB 128/53, CM (73).57th, 22 November 1973. On this see also “The Colonels Go Back to Square One”, *The Times* (19 November 1973).

¹³² “Military Coup in Greece Removes Papadopoulos”, *The New York Times* (26 November 1973).

¹³³ See his obituary in *The New York Times* (30 July 1999).

¹³⁴ FCO 9/1998 “Annual review for 1973” no. 56/74, Hooper to FCO, 7-1-1974.

¹³⁵ FCO 9/1717 Hooper to FCO, tel. no. 416, 27-11-1973.

¹³⁶ FCO 9/1717 “Greece: Recognition” memorandum WSG 1/4 by Goodison, 29-11-1973.

¹³⁷ NA: CAB 128/53, CM (73).59th, 4 December 1973.

emphasis on the last phrase)”, leaving him in no doubt as to the political orientation of the new regime.¹³⁸

1974

1974 marked a turning point in Anglo-Greek relations. The return of Harold Wilson to Downing Street, and especially his party’s stance towards Greece while in opposition in the early 1970s, meant that policy towards the military rulers in Athens would be considered in a different light. The most seminal event in that respect was not the general election of 28 February *per se*, but the decision, taken two weeks later, for the cancellation of British naval visits to Athens, a decision that “helped raise Britain’s prestige abroad”.¹³⁹ British ministers decided that the informal visit by HMS *Tiger* and HMS *Charybdis* to Athens, which had been arranged under the previous government and was due to begin on 15 March, should not take place.¹⁴⁰ The ambassador in Athens was instructed immediately to inform the Greek authorities of the decision and of his government’s concern over the political situation in the country, but also to avoid discussing Anglo-Greek relations further. He was only permitted to say, if necessary, that London expected to have a “variety of continuing business” to discuss with the Greeks, which they would hope to conduct “in a business-like way”.¹⁴¹ The Greek officials’ reaction was to say that their government would be “extremely resentful” both of the decision and of the manner in which it had been taken. It was also added that Anglo-Greek relations were bound to be severely affected and the possibility of a formal protest was not excluded, as “this was not the behaviour that Greece expected of an ally”.¹⁴² Other reactions on the Greek side varied from strong headlines in Athens dailies to the markedly more sober attitude of some government officials. *Εστία* made reference to the “disgraceful” British behaviour in Northern Ireland,¹⁴³ and *Ελεύθερος Κόσμος* used fiery rhetoric to denounce the British decision, also referring to Wilson’s minority government.¹⁴⁴ On the contrary, the Greek ambassador, Nikolaos

¹³⁸ FCO 9/1717 “Recognition”, Baker to Denson, 7-12-1973.

¹³⁹ David Childs, *Britain since 1945: A Political History*, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 182.

¹⁴⁰ FCO 9/2005 Callaghan to Athens, tel. no. 49, 13-3-1974, and NA: CAB 128/54, CM (74).3rd, Conclusions, 14 March 1973. See also James Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, London: Collins, 1987, p. 338.

¹⁴¹ FCO 9/2005 Callaghan to Athens, tel. no. 49, 13-3-1974. See also LE/1974/5.11, 4111.4/1/AS62, Broumas to Athens, 14-3-1974.

¹⁴² FCO 9/2015 Hooper to FCO, tel. no. 58, 14-3-1974.

¹⁴³ “Κύριο άρθρο” [Editorial], *Εστία* (18 March 1974).

¹⁴⁴ *Ελεύθερος Κόσμος* (17 March 1974), cited in FCO 9/2015 Hooper to FCO, tel. no. 67, 18-3-1974.

Broumas, adopted a very restrained attitude, expressed full understanding of the reasons for cancelling the naval visit and even volunteered that he had said to his own government that they had overreacted.¹⁴⁵

In the aftermath of the cancellation of the visit, the Wilson government seemed to be more determined to adopt a harder line towards the Greek military dictatorship.¹⁴⁶ After careful consideration, British ministers reached the conclusion that they should change the status of Anglo-Greek relations, slightly altering the wording from a “good working relationship” to a “proper working relationship”. The official responsible for Greece at the FCO, though, was quick to palliate Greek fears immediately, saying that this was a positive statement and that it was certainly the British intention that such a working relationship should go forward. Moreover, Goodison palliated N. Diamantopoulos’ anxiety over Britain’s attitude *vis-à-vis* Greece at NATO by claiming that relations would remain mostly unaffected, the only substantial change being in terms of appearances.¹⁴⁷

IV. Demise

This was the state of relations between Athens and London in the summer of 1974, immediately before the fall of the junta, which was largely caused by its adventurism in Cyprus. As a consequence of actions prompted by the regime in Athens, the whole of British (and international) attention was shifted eastwards to the island of Cyprus, where the Wilson government was faced with “a serious crisis”.¹⁴⁸ The first reports about outbreaks of fighting in Nicosia reached London on 15 July.¹⁴⁹ According to information gained during the first hours, it was looking “increasingly like a coup organised by Greek contingent/Greek-officered elements of National Guard”.¹⁵⁰ Back in the British capital, the reaction was immediate. A parliamentary question on the situation on the island and possible action by Britain gave James Callaghan, the foreign secretary, the opportunity to make an extensive statement on the subject. He gave information to the House of Commons about the events and referred to the action he had taken, namely that he had drawn the attention

¹⁴⁵ FCO 9/2015 Goodison to Hooper, 13-4-1974, and Killick to Goodison, 21-4-1974.

¹⁴⁶ G. Helmis, *Ταραγμένη διετία, 1973-1974* [The Troubled Two-year Period, 1973-1974], Athens 2006, p. 140.

¹⁴⁷ FCO 9/2015 “Anglo/Greek relations”, Goodison to Hooper, 22-4-1974.

¹⁴⁸ H. Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour Government, 1974-1976*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1979, p. 61.

¹⁴⁹ FCO 9/1890 Olver to FCO, tel. no. 178, 15-7-1974.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, tel. no. 180, 15-7-1974.

of the Greek and Turkish governments to the recognition and maintenance of independence, as well as the territorial integrity and security of Cyprus. Callaghan also said that he had urged the need for restraint on all sides and had asked for their urgent views on the situation.¹⁵¹ Sir Alec Douglas-Home joined the foreign secretary in the “utter condemnation” of the “brutal and senseless” alleged assassination of Makarios and expressed his hope that Athens and Ankara would jointly take action to calm “an explosive situation”. Callaghan replied that this was “a potentially explosive situation” that required “very great statesmanship and restraint” by both communities on the island in order to avoid even worse trouble.

The Turkish invasion of Cyprus on 20 July served as the final catalyst for the events set in motion by the coup against Makarios, inasmuch as it spelled disaster for the objectives of the Greek junta regarding the island, and it marked the end of the “anachronistic”¹⁵² military dictatorship in Greece. Only a couple of days later, while the British were preoccupied with the Geneva Conference on Cyprus, reports reached London that the junta was about to fall and that Gizikis had summoned “old” politicians to discuss the formation of a civilian government.¹⁵³ All in all, Greece’s exit from “seven years in a military strait-jacket”¹⁵⁴ was “warmly welcome”, with FCO officials admitting that the country had emerged from the dictatorship “in better shape” than they had expected. By the end of 1974, British interests were thought aligned with supporting the Karamanlis government, which was as “sensible, moderate and pro-Western” as any they could expect to see in Greece.¹⁵⁵

V. Conclusion

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, British governments were in a very weak position both financially and internationally and, therefore, had to follow pragmatic policies that were meant to prove Britain’s subordination to NATO and American interests. The Wilson government, after an initial numbness, went out of its way to establish a “good working relationship” with the Greek

¹⁵¹ London Press Service, Verbatim Service 132/74, 15 July 1974.

¹⁵² Sotiris Rizas, *Η ελληνική πολιτική μετά τον Εμφύλιο Πόλεμο* [Greek politics after the Civil War], Athens: Kastaniotis, 2008, p. 44.

¹⁵³ FCO 9/2003 Hooper to FCO, tel. no. 289, 23-7-1974. For valuable behind-the-scenes information about these crucial discussions, see Stavros P. Psycharis, *Τα παρασκήνια της αλλαγής. Ιούλιος 1974* [Behind the scenes of the change: July 1974], Athens 2013 [1974].

¹⁵⁴ FCO 9/2014 “The results of the Greek election”, Brooks Richards, Athens to Callaghan, 27-11-1974.

¹⁵⁵ FCO 9/2014 Goodison, FCO to Brooks Richards, 4-12-1974.

dictatorship that would permit the former to continue working with the government in Athens, and to make sure that the latter would continue to fulfil its NATO obligations, as a bastion of stability in the sensitive area of the Eastern Mediterranean. The colonels, in turn, were very quick to take advantage of Greece's increased geostrategic importance in the general context of the Cold War and to exploit their dealings with Western allies for reasons of legitimacy and domestic consumption. The picture of ambiguity of Labour's policy is completed by the differences between its rhetoric and actions, as, for example, providing Greece with arms and condoning it within NATO, while at the same time Labour ministers openly criticized the junta's methods and urged it towards a "return to constitutional rule" in fora such as the Council of Europe. Wilson, as much as he disliked them, did not sever relations with the colonels; he recognized them and kept trading with them, thus promoting a policy of "business as usual", but stopping short of unapologetically conducting warm relations with them and fulfilling all their demands (keeping contacts, including visits, to a minimum, for example). It was only after Labour returned to power following four years in opposition that Wilson appeared more adamant *vis-à-vis* the (new form of the) dictatorship, in an effort to illustrate the point that his policy was different from that of his predecessor and to make good on Labour's pre-election promises.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, due to their political orientation and the absence of a left wing, appeared "more realistic" to the Greek dictatorship, following a pragmatic policy *par excellence*. They concentrated on Greece's allegiance to the Atlantic Alliance, continuing but also strengthening a "good working relationship", including actively promoting trade. To achieve this, cooperation in all fields, and most importantly defence, was pursued, with visits on both sides serving the purpose of bringing London closer to Athens. The basic objectives of policy towards Greece were changed to reflect "a new spirit" in relations, whereby the government in London would not twist the junta's arm over a return to constitutional rule and democratic liberties. The Conservatives followed what I call the doctrine of "disconnected responsibilities" (introduced earlier by Labour), making clear that the NATO and the Council of Europe contexts were completely different and separate, and that developments in one would not spill over onto the other. In this sense, the Tories lived up to the junta's expectations of them, as a Western European conservative party with a strong affiliation to NATO. Greek ministers, knowing they could see eye to eye with their British counterparts, pushed for closer relations with Britain through constantly playing the security card, but also always asking for more in their dealings with London. The familiar tight-rope

act of Britain's relations with the junta was also obvious under Heath, insofar as trade figures almost doubled and relations became warmer, but the British also failed to provide sufficient encouragement to the Markezinis experiment and were constrained by their participation in the European integration process. The Greek military regime, on the other hand, struggled to cultivate relations with Britain primarily for domestic and international prestige reasons. Whereas Whitehall pursued a policy of "good working relations" with the junta in order to promote British interests *vis-à-vis* NATO, Cyprus and trade, the leadership in Athens was interested in using British support to gain legitimacy internationally and domestically, as well as to secure *quid pro quos*.

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