

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 523–524.

<sup>51</sup>B. Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglement*, pp. 228–229; Edward C. Thaden, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912* (University Park, 1965), pp. 65–81.

<sup>52</sup>Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria, 1878–1918; A History* (Boulder Colo.: East European Monographs, 1983), p. 406.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 407.

<sup>54</sup>Steven K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804–1945* (New York, 1999) p. 196.

<sup>55</sup>Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalry and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908–1914* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 45–46; Ernst C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1938), pp. 53–57.

<sup>56</sup>Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans*, p. 197.

<sup>57</sup>Stavrianos, *The Balkans*, p. 533.

<sup>58</sup>B. Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglement*, p. 231–232.

<sup>59</sup>Ernst C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 75–77.

<sup>60</sup>The Treaty of London (30 May 1913), which ended the First Balkan War, awarded most of Macedonia, the territory coveted by Bulgaria to Greece and Serbia. The Treaty, under pressure from the Austro-Hungarians, declared Albania an independent state, although most of its territory had been occupied by Greece and Serbia—both Balkan states grudgingly withdrew their forces.

<sup>61</sup>Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery of Europe*, p. 498.

## Utopian Dream or Lost Opportunity? A Tripartite Commission to Rehabilitate Postwar Greece

*John O. Iatrides*

The unique wartime coalition that Winston Churchill labeled “The Grand Alliance”<sup>1</sup> proved successful despite conflicting national interests and priorities, mutual suspicions and rivalries, and endless stresses and strains of every kind. Much has been written about friction between the Soviet Union and its two principal western allies. Less attention has been paid to a variety of disagreements in Anglo-American relations which surfaced despite the close personal relationship between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill and the cooperation they and their principal advisers achieved in the war effort.

The issues that tested the alliance included the fate of many nations of East-Central Europe which in the course of the war had suffered enormous devastation and whose future as free and independent states was anything but certain as their region appeared destined to fall under Soviet control. One such country was Greece, Britain's ally from the earliest days of the war against the Axis powers. The brutal occupation by German, Italian and Bulgarian armies, the collapse of the prewar dictatorship and the splintering of the country's political forces had left the nation in ruins and raised the specter of anarchy, widespread poverty and political violence which the two western Allies could not ignore. A review of the

impact of Greece's post-liberation problems on relations between the United States and Britain sheds light not only on some of the fault-lines of the bilateral relationship but also on the prospects that the wartime cooperation with the Soviet Union could continue after the common enemy had been defeated.

Long before military victory appeared assured, the principal Allies began preparations to address the more serious problems which many smaller countries were expected to face after the war. Most of the planning was done by the United States and the governments of the British Commonwealth which were to provide not only the necessary relief supplies but also the administrative personnel, transport facilities, technical advice and supervision of the recovery effort. The most pressing needs were expected to be in food, medicine, fuel and building materials for emergency shelters. Especially in the Balkans, where prewar political institutions and civil society had been weak or had all but collapsed, the Allies might also be called upon to assist in establishing law and order, provide basic social services and remove vestiges of collaborationist regimes.

For the Roosevelt administration the master plan for long-term international cooperation and economic development, and for establishing a permanent authority to promote peace and security at the global level, was the proposed United Nations Organization. Relying mostly on American planning, personnel and resources, a temporary agency for emergency assistance, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), was prepared to go into action as soon as conditions in the liberated countries allowed. To provide immediate relief in the Balkans an Anglo-American "Supply Center" was created which, in the end, functioned only in Greece where the presence of British troops afforded the necessary security. During the "military period" immediately following liberation and before it was safe for UNRRA to enter the field a "British Military Liaison" service was to be in charge of civil affairs and operate the Supply Center.<sup>2</sup>

Friction between British and American personnel involved in relief planning for Greece surfaced almost immediately. The American head of UNRRA's Balkan mission, Laird Archer, considered

his British colleagues haughty and "a hard-headed lot who do not look with favor upon interference . . . [G]ood fellows, genial hosts, expansive toward junior cousins from overseas just so long as we follow the indicated trend." Laird thought that the British acted behind a veil of secrecy, refusing to share with officials of other nationalities, including representatives of the nations to be assisted, vital information about planned relief operations. He was particularly annoyed by "The attitude that the Greeks . . . must be treated like children who cannot be trusted, and that plans must be left to their superiors who know better what's good for them. . . ." And although officially the Soviet government was to be treated as a partner in UNRRA's planning for the Balkans, the British ambassador in Cairo, Reginald Leeper, confided to Archer that "he would consider as nothing less than catastrophic Soviet Russia having any place of influence in the relief administration in Greece."<sup>3</sup>

Dissention and rivalry between British and Americans in the field over Greek issues were not limited to those involved in relief work. Through much of the war British and American intelligence agencies which engaged in clandestine operations in and around Greece often acted at cross purposes and hindered each others' work. Agents of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) believed that the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was favoring the leftist EAM/ELAS Resistance movement and seeking to undermine British influence in Greece. Churchill, who had played a leading role in the establishment of the wartime Special Operations Executive (SOE), and followed closely its underground activities in occupied Europe, complained to Roosevelt about anti-British attitudes in the ranks of the OSS.<sup>4</sup> On their part, OSS officials were critical of what they viewed as British attempts to "subordinate the common interest of defeating the Germans to what they consider is the interest of the postwar British Empire . . . [W]hile individually honorable, [British agents] may resort, where the Empire is concerned, to the most dishonest and ruthless behavior on the highest moral principle."<sup>5</sup>

UNRRA officials were aware that the war and enemy occupation had caused living conditions in Greece to drop to dangerously low

levels and that prompt relief operations on a large scale would be essential. To complicate the task, political divisions and the rising level of anarchy and partisan violence were likely to hinder the delivery and distribution of emergency assistance. Beyond the Greeks' own quarrels, there were also major disagreements between Washington and London on how to address Greece's more fundamental problems and, in particular, the so-called constitutional issue.

During the war, Britain, the traditional patron of modern Greece and its monarchy, had played a dominant role in that country's affairs. Under an Anglo-American understanding reached at the Quebec conference in August 1943, the entire Mediterranean region had been consigned to Britain's zone of military responsibility. After 1941, Britain had emerged as the benefactor and guardian of the Greek government in exile and of King George II. British intelligence services promoted and supplied Resistance groups and British liaison officers were attached to major guerrilla bands in an attempt to harness their efforts to the allied cause and prevent their domination by the communists. At the heart of Britain's policy was the belief that the restoration of King George and his cabinet offered the best guarantee that Greece would remain in Britain's postwar sphere of influence and beyond Moscow's expanding orbit. The problem with that strategy was that the majority of Greeks were strongly opposed to the king's return, fearing the restoration of a royalist regime similar to the dictatorship which the monarch had sanctioned in 1936. Hoping to defuse the situation, at the urging of British officials the king and his government had announced that following their return to Athens the nation would be given the opportunity to decide by referendum the monarchy's future (the "constitutional issue"). To the king's many critics, whose ranks included American diplomats, such a promise was anything but reassuring. As a result, the issue of the unpopular king's return continued to inflame Greek political passions and to create friction between the British and American governments complicating their plans for post-liberation Greece.

In March 1943, the Department of State declared that "the question of the acceptability of King George II by the Greek people is

one that can only be determined by the latter," and warned that British support for the king and his government "besides constituting intervention in Greek internal affairs, seems likely to stir up political dissention and divide the Greek people on the old Royalist and anti-Royalist lines, rather than to create unity." Returning the king and his government "under the wing of an Allied military occupation would largely deny to the Greek people the free choice of their own Government promised in Article 3 of the Atlantic Charter. More immediately, it might well involve serious internal disorders, since it appears from reliable indications that both political and military elements in Greece are organized to oppose a restoration of the King."<sup>6</sup> Wishing to distance itself from London's interventionist intentions the Department cautioned that "the principal Allied Governments should carefully avoid any action which would create the impression that they intend to impose the King on the Greek people under the protection of an Allied invading force or that the Greek people can secure the rewards of the common victory only at the price of accepting the return of the monarchy. This Government would regard it as a great tragedy should any civil disturbances arise in Greece as a result of internal opposition to the return of the King, in which it might be necessary for Allied troops to intervene."<sup>7</sup>

On matters of more immediate importance the Department of State was prepared to cooperate with British officials in addressing the domestic problems of Balkan states following their liberation from enemy occupation. The issue was particularly significant since, as Secretary of State Cordell Hull had advised the president, "I do not believe that the Balkans can be separated from the overall united war effort or that we can avoid our share of political and economic responsibility in this area which our general policies have lead our own citizens and the rest of the world to expect us to assume. . . ." And to drive the point home, he added: ". . . we will be called upon to furnish approximately 80% of the civilian supplies for the area."<sup>8</sup>

In September 1943, with Roosevelt's authorization, the Department communicated to the British government its readiness to

participate in the Administration of Territory Committee for the Balkans (ATB) "in order to meet the increasingly urgent need for a direct method of Anglo-US collaboration as regards the Balkans and with a view to full US participation in the execution of agreed political and economic policies in that area." Following months of equivocation the British authorities responded that the question of American representation on the ATB, a British military-civilian agency, had been "discussed at the highest level in North Africa" and promised to provide "a definite reply as soon as they knew the results of those discussions." The issue was dropped when the president returned Hull's memo with the notation: "C.H. I don't remember any discussions on this in Cairo or elsewhere. FDR."<sup>9</sup> In fact, British resistance to American involvement in the Balkans was deeply ingrained. In May 1943, the head of SOE operations in Cairo, Lord Glenconner, told Ambassador Leeper: "I think . . . that as soon as [the Americans] have got their personnel, schools, equipment for War Stations, W/T sets and aircraft etc. they will throw off [our] control and do just what they like. If so, the result in the Balkans will be chaotic."<sup>10</sup>

Washington's periodic objections and warnings appeared to have little effect on British officials, particularly as their fears of Soviet aggressive intentions in Eastern Europe steadily increased. In May 1944, a top-level memorandum to British military commands in the Middle East was categorical: "Our long term political and military objects [sic] are to retain Greece as a British sphere of influence and to prevent Russian domination of Greece, which would gravely prejudice our strategical position in the Eastern Mediterranean."<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt's determination to avoid Balkan entanglements, his tendency to ignore his diplomatic advisers<sup>12</sup> and his willingness to give Churchill a free hand in Eastern Europe undermined occasional American efforts to influence the course of events in Greece. Bowing to the realities of the situation, in June 1943 the Department of State moderated its previous position and agreed to raise no objections to the return of King George and his government "unless it should become clear during the military operations that such return would be overwhelmingly contrary to

the wishes of the people and could only result in civil warfare."<sup>13</sup> In August 1944, following consultations with UNRRA officials, the departments of War and State informed London that in countries to be liberated from enemy occupation the "United States military is not prepared to engage in maintenance of law and order even though such operations should be necessary to make relief distribution possible." Accordingly, "the British military must have sufficient authority available to permit it, if need arises, to cope with local disorders or even with enemy resistance."<sup>14</sup>

As the liberation of the Balkans appeared imminent, the American ambassador to Greece, Lincoln MacVeagh, sought to warn Roosevelt about Britain's "active interventionist policy in Yugoslavia and Greece which is the very opposite of our policy" and urged the president to "make it clear that we are not supporting this policy, or the British puppet Governments in Greece and Yugoslavia." In the brief conversation that followed, Roosevelt readily acknowledged "the tendency of the British and Russians to come into conflict in the Balkans" and added: "It isn't so bad now, but may become worse. And I don't want our men to be involved." A disappointed MacVeagh recorded in his diary: "The meaning of this . . . would seem to be that Pilate is washing his hands, or, to paraphrase Bacon, 'What are the Balkans?' asked jesting Roosevelt, and would not stay for an answer.' He has handed over the region to his friend Churchill, and as the latter must take the responsibility, it is 100 per cent sure that Franklin will not call a halt to any of his doings . . ."<sup>15</sup> The president did not mention to MacVeagh that earlier in the year he had advised the Department of State that "It would be a great mistake for us to participate in a military campaign against the Balkans at this time. We can attach half a dozen observers to the British army, but should do nothing further till later."<sup>16</sup>

In Sept 1944, a new Greek cabinet under George Papandreou was moved from Cairo to Italy in preparation for sailing home escorted by British troops; King George had agreed to remain in London for the time being. At a meeting in Caserta convened by high-level British military and diplomatic officials the regular Greek armed forces in the Middle East and the principal Resistance armies were

formally placed under the command of a British officer, Gen. Ronald Scobie. The communist-controlled guerrilla army ELAS was ordered to remain away from Athens and the surrounding Attica region; the liberation of the capital was to take place under the command of royalist or staunchly anti-communist officers and British troops. And on October 9, in Moscow, Churchill and Stalin agreed to divide their responsibilities in Eastern Europe under the now notorious "spheres of influence" agreement.<sup>17</sup> The secret arrangement revealed Churchill's powerlessness to prevent the eventual domination of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union and his determination to retain Greece exclusively in Britain's sphere. He may have acted in the nick of time; in the days following his deal with Stalin, Red Army troops poised to enter Greek territory were diverted to Yugoslavia instead.<sup>18</sup> Determined to keep his distance, MacVeagh received his superiors' permission to decline a British invitation to join the Papandreou cabinet in Italy and travel with it to Athens in the company of its British escorts. MacVeagh remained in Cairo and flew to Athens in an American military plane.

By most accounts, Stalin honored his October 1944 commitment to give Britain a free hand in post-liberation Greece.<sup>19</sup> Following the December 1944 EAM/ELAS uprising in Athens the Soviet leader lamented to his Bulgarian confidant, Georgi Dimitrov: "I advised not starting this fighting in Greece . . . They've taken on more than they can handle. They were evidently counting on the Red Army's coming down to the Aegean. We cannot do that. We cannot send our troops into Greece, either. The Greeks have acted foolishly."<sup>20</sup> Stalin also reportedly told Dimitrov that the United States and Britain "would never tolerate a 'red' Greece threatening their vital communications to the Middle East."<sup>21</sup>

As many American observers had feared, on December 3, only a few weeks after the liberation of Athens, the Papandreou coalition government collapsed when the leftist ministers resigned and fighting erupted in and around the capital. The spark for the crisis was provided by a government order, issued by General Scobie, demanding the disarming of all Resistance bands. Afraid that the loss of ELAS would deprive it of critically important leverage, the

communist-dominated EAM refused to comply. Within days British troops went into action to prevent ELAS from seizing control of the city. When Papandreou offered to resign, Ambassador Leeper instructed him to continue in office. The fighting lasted for more than a month and was quelled only when British reinforcements were rushed to the Greek capital from Italy. The spectacle of British soldiers doing battle against Resistance fighters of an allied nation aroused the wrath of public opinion in Britain and the United States. Churchill faced withering criticism in parliament and in the press. On December 25 the beleaguered prime minister flew to Athens and at a hastily assembled conference he lectured representatives of the principal factions on the need to stop the fighting and find peaceful ways to settle their differences under the leadership of Archbishop Damascinos who was to be named regent. Although sporadic fighting continued, ELAS was eventually forced to withdraw and in February 1945, under the Varkiza agreement, the insurgents accepted defeat. The key political issues were to be settled by a plebiscite on the monarchy and parliamentary elections and a new government. For the time being, the Greek crisis appeared to have been defused.

American reaction to the outbreak of violence in Athens, and particularly to the employment of British troops in seeking to quell it, was swift and unambiguous. Secretary of State Stettinius released a statement declaring that ". . . the United States policy has always been to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of other nations. In conformity with this policy, the United States has scrupulously refrained from interfering in the affairs of other countries which have been liberated from the Germans. The United States will continue to refrain from interference in the affairs of other countries. Unless the military security of the Allied armies is at stake, the United States will make no attempt to influence the composition of any government in any friendly country."<sup>22</sup> Following Stettinius' statement and in violation of the regional Allied chain of command, the Chief of US Naval Operations ordered the US Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet to forbid the use of American ships to carry supplies to the British forces in Greece. The order,

about which an enraged Churchill threatened to complain directly to Roosevelt, was quickly nullified by the transfer to the British navy of the seven vessels in question.<sup>23</sup>

### The Proposal

On December 8, 1944, in a personal letter to Roosevelt, MacVeagh analyzed the many factors which, in his view, had contributed to the upheaval in Athens and concluded: "But at bottom, the handling of this fanatically freedom-loving country (which has never yet taken dictation quietly) as if it were composed of natives under the British Raj, is what is the trouble, and Mr. Churchill's recent prohibition against the Greeks attempting a political solution at this time, if a blunder, is only the latest of a long line of blunders during the entire course of the present war . . . ." <sup>24</sup> A veteran at his diplomatic post with a deep knowledge of Greek history and local political realities, MacVeagh gave the president a carefully reasoned explanation for the violence he was observing at first hand: "neither pure royalism nor pure communism has many followers in Greece today, while each enjoys accretions of strength, none the less dangerous for being fundamentally fictitious, from suspicions which are rife and growing among democrats with possessions, on the one hand, and among democrats without possessions but hungry, homeless and armed on the other . . . But the Greeks will never be quiet under any dictatorship, or suspicion of dictatorship, from either right or left. Therefore, I feel that a hopeful solution for the present situation must involve removing any such suspicions." Because of the escalating bloody upheaval neither a government installed by the British nor EAM could propose a settlement that would be acceptable to the other side. This apparent stalemate could, nevertheless, be overcome: "Disarm such suspicion on both sides . . . and there is enough soundness left in the Greeks, despite all they have gone through, to warrant some hope that they may settle back to their relatively harmless normal state of political instability with the passage of time, the restoration of communication and the provision of

food and shelter. Otherwise, communism will continue to exploit its present marvelous opportunities for still further collapsing the social order and creating a 'Greek problem' to plague Britain, and us too in the background, perhaps for many years to come."<sup>25</sup>

For MacVeagh the key to solving the Greek crisis was the introduction of a "neutral agency" that would command the respect of all parties concerned: "I believe that a commission on which British, Russian and American members should all sit, to guarantee impartiality, would do the trick." Aware of the president's persistent refusal to involve the United States in Balkan squabbles and in Anglo-Soviet disputes over that region, he pressed his point: "Of course, I realize that to set up an International Commission is a serious affair, presenting many difficulties. But I give you the suggestion advisedly, believing that the problem to be solved is also serious. If Britain herself could be got to propose it, to save her 'face' which is now deeply involved, this might go far towards setting her back on a 'good wicket,' even if it were never actually put into effect, but for success in composing Greek differences it would have to be implemented." MacVeagh believed that to succeed, his proposal required that the initiative come from the President of the United States.<sup>26</sup>

The key element in MacVeagh's analysis of the root-cause of the Greek crisis is his characterization of the two rival camps as "democrats with possessions" on the one hand and "democrats without possessions but hungry, homeless and armed" on the other. In retrospect, this explanation may be viewed by some as naïve or simplistic. Yet it is significant that in December 1944 an experienced American diplomat saw the communist-controlled Left in Greece not as a revolutionary force bent on imposing a one-party dictatorship tied to international communism but as the populist movement of the disenfranchised seeking legitimacy and empowerment. Undoubtedly many officials in Washington shared MacVeagh's view of the Greek problem. These Americans perceived Stalin not as the high priest of communist revolution but as a potentially useful partner in any attempts to defuse the crisis in Greece.

In his letter MacVeagh was also able to report to the president

that he had discussed his proposal with his British colleague in Athens who claimed that "similar ideas had 'come into his mind.' He agreed fully as to the fundamental nature of the clash here, and that something must be done 'after the present battle is over' to disarm these suspicions." Leeper, who only a few months earlier had told Archer in Cairo that he would consider "nothing less than catastrophic" a Soviet involvement in UNRRA's relief operations in Greece, now foresaw "the possibility of a tripartite Commission of the three great powers to guarantee an equitable settlement of the nation's problems, mentioning the 'precedent' of the three 'guaranteeing powers' after Greece's war of independence." Still, Leeper was not prepared to stick his neck out. As MacVeagh told the president: "... he feared to go too far on the matter himself and thought the person most likely to succeed with Mr. Churchill would be you."<sup>27</sup>

In a telegram to the Department MacVeagh outlined the essence of his letter to the president and expressed the belief that the Greek crisis would be defused "if after restoration of order in Athens the British were able and willing to announce formation of an international commission composed of British, Russian and American representatives to oversee the holding of a plebiscite on the regime and guarantee impartial settlement of other critical problems likely to cause trouble." The British ambassador was communicating the same suggestion to his superiors in London. MacVeagh concluded: "I feel certain that the present drastic foreign support being given to one side of local Greek quarrel in which so much genuine patriotic fervor and even fanaticism is enlisted in the other contains little if any hope of furnishing a durable solution unless it can be followed by some such clear proof of genuine impartial interest in the Greek people as a whole."<sup>28</sup>

In Washington disapproval of British intervention in Greece did not easily overcome the desire to steer clear of becoming involved in the on-going squabble. After receiving MacVeagh's telegram Stettinius reminded Roosevelt that his Department had already issued a public statement "favoring a free Greek choice of future Government and attempting to disassociate us from British policy."

At the same time the Secretary acknowledged MacVeagh's proposal without endorsing it: "In this country the public has strongly supported the Department's declared position, but many demands are accumulating for: 1) Strong representations to the British; 2) United States mediation; and 3) establishment in Greece of a United States-Soviet-British Commission to ensure a fair deal." In a separate memorandum to the president Stettinius correctly anticipated London's most probable reaction to the suggestion for a tripartite commission: "It seems likely that Mr. Churchill would immediately veto Russian participation, as he appears acutely to fear Russian penetration into Greece, and I think we should refuse any possible counter-proposal to intervene on a purely Anglo-American basis." He added a consideration that had previously been rejected by the military: "I should also have some hesitancy in participating in an international commission unless we are prepared to send some civil affairs troops into Greece so that we could actually be sure of what was going on. You may consider Ambassador MacVeagh's proposal impracticable, for the foregoing or other reasons. However, in communicating our reaction to his proposal, we might well ask the Ambassador to report whether he or the British there have any suggestions to submit as to any way in which we could be helpful."<sup>29</sup>

Concerned that reaction to Britain's military intervention in the Greek crisis was damaging Anglo-American relations, and that Churchill had become the target of severe criticism in the American press, Roosevelt sent the prime minister strong words of sympathy while explaining why officially the United States had to remain strictly neutral. The president could not have been more solicitous: "I have been as deeply concerned as you have yourself in regard to the tragic difficulties you have encountered in Greece. I appreciate to the full the anxious and difficult alternatives with which you have been faced. I regard my role in this matter as that of a loyal friend and ally whose one desire is to be of any help possible in the circumstances . . ." Nevertheless, personal sentiments aside, "... there are limitations imposed in part by the traditional policies of the United States and in part by the mounting adverse

reaction of public opinion in this country. No one will understand better than yourself that I, both personally and as head of State, am necessarily responsive to the state of public feeling. It is for these reasons that it has not been possible for this Government to take a stand along with you in the present course of events in Greece." As for practical advice, Roosevelt thought that it would help matters if the Greek king agreed to a regency and promised that he would not return unless invited to do so by a plebiscite. Also, if all military forces and not just those of the Left were disarmed and dissolved. The president made no mention of a tripartite commission for Greece.<sup>30</sup>

As the Department of State continued to monitor developments in Greece MacVeagh's suggestion appeared to remain alive. On December 20 Britain's foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, informed the House of Commons that "If our Allies will come and help" in organizing free elections in Greece "their help will be welcomed." Reacting to Eden's statement the Department's Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs recommended that "we should be prepared to take an active part in a tripartite commission if requested to do so." The memorandum specifically mentioned "sharing responsibility in the administration of impartial plebiscite."<sup>31</sup>

In Athens, following his hastily assembled meeting with political leaders (at which MacVeagh and the head of a Soviet military team had been silent observers) Churchill told a large gathering of journalists that if the fighting continued the Allies might have to place Greece under a temporary international trust.<sup>32</sup> Later in the day MacVeagh had a private talk with the British leader and reported to the Department Churchill's determination to crush the leftist insurrection. "After that he appears to be thinking of the possibility of composing matters in the rest of Greece through the medium of a commission of the three great powers, somewhere along the lines of my suggestion to you in my letter of December 8." Asked what message he might wish to send to the president, Churchill's response was blunt as well as somewhat disingenuous: "Tell him that I hope he can help us in some way. We want nothing from Greece . . . We came in here by agreement with our Allies

to chase the Germans out and then found that we had to fight to keep the people here in Athens from being massacred. Now if we can do that properly—and we will—all we want is to get out of this damned place."<sup>33</sup>

As the defeat and disarming of the insurgents appeared certain the British side lost interest in a tripartite commission. In messages to Roosevelt on December 28 and 30 Churchill asked for the president's help in persuading the king to accept the regency of Archbishop Damaskinos and for American support for the regent. No other form of allied cooperation in Greece was mentioned. On the other hand, in the Department of State discussion of a possible tripartite commission continued. According to a memorandum prepared on January 1, 1945, consideration was being given to a "military commission headed by a special representative other than its Ambassador to Greece. The commission should be provided with sufficient military civil affairs personnel to enable our Commissioner to keep fully informed." In a significant departure from previous protestations of neutrality in the Greek crisis, the Department now asserted that "should the EAM-ELAS oppose by arms the efforts of the Archbishop Regent to find a reasonable political solution in Greece, it would then be clear that the extreme left minority was seeking to gain power by force. In such an event . . . this Government should make clear its support of the Archbishop Regent and the duly constituted authorities."<sup>34</sup>

The Varkiza agreement, signed on February 12, 1945 by the newly formed government of the republican warhorse Nikolaos Plastiras and representatives of EAM, formally ended the fighting and paved the way for a plebiscite on the monarchy question and for parliamentary elections. As a result, American fears that the violence might continue were allayed. However, even with ELAS disarmed and despite a semblance of order established across the country, the political situation remained volatile. On March 15 MacVeagh reported that EAM had addressed to the governments of Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and France a request for the establishment, under the terms of the Yalta Agreement, of "an Inter-Allied Commission to study the situation in Greece and

to make [take] those measures which will assure the Greek people the democratic liberties which are an essential and urgent preliminary to a genuine plebiscite and elections."<sup>35</sup> There is no record of an American response to EAM's request.

The proposal for an Allied commission to Greece was to surface again, seemingly out of nowhere. One of the three "Top Secret and Personal" messages Roosevelt sent to Churchill on March 21, 1945 opened with: "What would you think of sending a special mission for developing the productive power of Greece rapidly by concerted, non-political action?" The president was ready to name the members of the high-power commission he envisioned: Oliver Lyttleton, British Minister of Production, A. I. Mikoyan, a veteran Bolshevik and People's Commissar for Foreign Trade, and Donald Nelson, one-time executive with the Sears Roebuck company who had recently been removed as chairman of the War Production Board (WPB). Roosevelt thought the three could meet in Greece "in about a month's time." Aware that the proposal might come as a surprise to his British friend the president concluded: "I am not taking it up with the Soviet Government until I get your slant."<sup>36</sup>

Despite its three-member composition, Roosevelt's proposed commission was not what MacVeagh had suggested to the president. In early December 1944, what MacVeagh thought was urgently needed was a three-power team of high-ranking officials who could compel the Greeks to end the fighting in Athens and agree to settle their differences through the political process. By March 1945, with the Varkiza agreement in place and under a new government the country's fundamental political questions appeared to be heading toward peaceful resolution and the nation's attention had shifted to the holding of the plebiscite on the king's return and elections.<sup>37</sup> Although unrest continued and mutual suspicions remained, there appeared to be no need for a dramatic allied intervention, especially since British officials continued to advise the government and British troops in significant strength remained in Greece. By contrast, Roosevelt's proposal assumed that a political settlement had already been achieved and that conditions were sufficiently stable to allow a three-power effort to rebuild the country's

economy, a process likely to prove both slow and costly. Moreover, the president's message ignored the fact that on March 1, following persistent friction and disagreements within UNRRA operations in Greece, most of the agency's American officials had resigned and a gruff British army general had been placed in charge. Although UNRRA's operations were to continue—by the end of 1946 more than \$350 million had been spent in Greece<sup>38</sup>—at least on the economic front Anglo-American cooperation in Greece had reached a new low. As a practical matter, the president's suggestion that the commission might convene in Athens in a month's time was also hardly realistic. Consultations among the three Allies and the Greek government to define the purpose, authority, staff and anticipated results of the mission would not have been easy, especially while the war in Europe was still in progress.

More important, virtually on the day of Roosevelt's proposal to Churchill, the Soviet government abruptly announced its intention not to renew its 1925 "Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality" with Turkey unless Ankara accepted unspecified demands and modifications. Moscow's sudden announcement and its harsh tone gave rise to fears that Soviet demands would include territorial concessions and a base on the Dardanelles, a prospect that officials in London and Washington—and, even more, Ankara and Athens—were bound to view with considerable alarm.<sup>39</sup> Under the circumstances, inviting Moscow to take part in the economic development of Greece would have been a highly questionable diplomatic gesture.

In making his proposal Roosevelt did not consult the Department of State or his principal advisers. Moreover, he named as the American representative on the commission someone he had recently removed from a top government position, a man whose detractors included influential officials in Washington. The surprise choice was apparently not without clever instigation. The day before he sent his message to Churchill the president had received from Donald Nelson a private note in which the one-time business executive with no experience in Greece offered unsolicited advice on matters of foreign policy which, one suspects, he hoped might

land him a new assignment: "I think it is safe to say that many of Greece's political difficulties have roots in her present productive weakness, and could be resolved by an upsurge of production . . . .As I see it, many important consequences would flow from success in restoring and increasing the productivity of the Greek people . . . Small nations everywhere would take renewed hope, while American prestige and influence would be further strengthened."<sup>40</sup>

Churchill's response, sent on April 3, was a masterful diplomatic parry. While appearing to welcome the president's proposal, the British leader effectively emasculated it: "I am attracted by the suggestion in your No 723 that a high-powered economic mission should visit Greece, but I am rather doubtful whether this is an appropriate moment to bring the Russians in. We cannot expect any help from the Russians in the economic sphere, and to include them in the mission would be a purely political gesture. As such, it might be valuable if we could be sure that the Russian representative would behave correctly and make a public demonstration of his solidarity with our policy, but this assumption seems very doubtful." Churchill was determined to capitalize on the "spheres of influence" deal he had struck with Stalin in early October: "There is the further disadvantage that at a time when the Russians are firmly excluding both you and us from any say in the affairs of Roumania, it would be rather odd to invite them unsolicited to assume some degree of responsibility in Greek affairs."

On the other hand, Churchill was eager to have the United States share with Britain the responsibility of advising the Greek government, especially since British influence in Athens could safely be expected to remain strong. "If you agree, I suggest that a joint Anglo-American committee should be established, comprising the appropriate British and American experts and responsible to our two Embassies." Still, he did not wish to give the impression that he was rejecting out of hand the president's proposal: "I feel that this [Anglo-American] committee should be set in motion before we consider sending a mission on the lines you suggest," and not until UNRRA, now under British direction, was fully deployed and operating in Greece. "Once all this new machinery has begun

to work, a high-powered mission on the lines you suggest might do great good by smoothing out difficulties and getting things moving. By that time we might also have resolved the troubles in Roumania and be in a position to invite the Russians to join the mission." Ever the skilled diplomat, Churchill concluded his message with a flattering nod in Nelson's direction: "We should, of course, welcome the assistance of Donald Nelson at any time, and if it [is] convenient for him to visit Greece now, I would certainly not suggest that he should delay his journey until a full Allied mission can be sent. The problems to be overcome in Greece are so formidable and urgent that his presence there even for a short visit might be of the greatest help."<sup>41</sup>

In his authoritative *Churchill & Roosevelt. Their Complete Correspondence* Warren F. Kimball suggests another possible motive for Churchill's cleverly evasive response to the proposal for a tripartite commission. Arguing that "it was not just the Russian bear which worried the Prime Minister," Kimball speculates that "Roosevelt's proposal indicated that American business was interested in the Greek market, and Churchill's suggestion for a joint Anglo-American committee to dispense financial and economic advice to the Greek Government suggests that the British wanted to make sure that the United States did not operate alone."<sup>42</sup> This intriguing suspicion may not be totally unfounded: during the 1930s the meager American involvement in Greece was based largely on financial and commercial interests. Nevertheless, given the harsh realities of the political and economic conditions in Greece in spring 1945, the suggestion that Churchill had detected in Roosevelt's proposal and Nelson's nomination a business-interest angle is less than convincing.

The president's response, approved by the Department of State and sent on April 8, reflected the views of the top Washington officials involved in Anglo-American relations and European affairs: "I recognize the force of the observations on the Russian angle in your 932 and agree that it might be better not to go forward with a tripartite economic mission at the present time. On the other hand I think it would be a mistake to set up a bilateral mission. This

would look as though we, for our part, were disregarding the Yalta decision for tripartite action in liberated areas and might easily be interpreted as indicating that we consider the Yalta decisions as no longer valid. Such is certainly not the case, as you know, and I therefore feel that we must be careful not to do anything that would weaken the effectiveness of our efforts to get the Russians to honor those decisions on their side." Roosevelt reminded Churchill that Washington had already rejected a British proposal for an Anglo-American committee of economic experts for Greece. On the other hand, it had agreed to send specialists to assist in restoring transportation facilities in Greece: "Our people are doing all they can to help UNRRA to do a good job" in that country. Finally, Roosevelt persisted in finding a new assignment for his former War Production Board czar: "While it seems impracticable at the moment to set up an economic mission in Greece on a tripartite or bilateral basis, I think it might be helpful if I send Donald Nelson out anyway, with a few assistants, to make a survey of the needs and possibilities for me. I shall discuss this with him and keep you informed of any developments."<sup>43</sup>

It was not to be. On April 12, four days after his latest message to Churchill, Roosevelt died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. With the president's sudden death the idea of a high-profile allied mission to Greece, with or without Soviet participation, was also buried. The new president, Harry S. Truman, and his advisers confronted a Soviet Union whose conduct across East-Central Europe caused them growing frustration and alarm. The possibility of collaboration with Moscow in Greece or elsewhere all but disappeared. British influence in Athens remained strong, and mid-level consultations with Americans continued until February 1947 when the Labour government announced that it was ending its assistance to Greece and Turkey. By then Washington was ready to act boldly in an attempt to block the further expansion of Soviet power and influence in Europe. The first step was the "Truman Doctrine." Defeating the unfolding communist insurgency in Greece, which Truman's advisers attributed to Moscow's instigation, and propping up Turkey in its rejection of Soviet territorial demands would

launch America's strategy of containing Stalin's growing empire. The cold war was on.

### In Retrospect

We will never know with certainty what prompted Roosevelt to revive MacVeagh's idea for an Allied mission for Greece and propose it to Churchill. Whatever his deeper motives, his message revealed his hope that the spirit of wartime cooperation, in which Stalin had been a necessary if often prickly partner, might be preserved, at least for a while. To be sure, in his dealings with the Soviet dictator the president had encountered difficulties which upset him and he was not naïve about the prospects for normal East-West relations once the war had ended. A realist, he knew that America's relations with the Bolshevik regime had never been easy and that, after the defeat of the Axis, conflict with the Soviets in Europe or in Asia remained a real possibility. Nevertheless, the momentous legacy of the war effort and the apparent success of the Yalta agreements had left room for hope that conflict with Moscow on a broad front was not inevitable and might be avoided. Compared to its two principal allies, the United States had no particular stake in the Balkans and little to lose if in the end the problems of Greece could not be resolved by three-power intervention. A collaborative effort in that small corner of the Balkans involved few risks for America and might be worth the gamble. With Roosevelt in the White House, a major East-West split did not appear imminent and diplomacy remained the instrument of choice.

After Roosevelt, Washington's perception of Soviet behavior would undergo radical change, becoming consistently negative as the end of the war approached and new points of friction with Moscow emerged with increasing regularity. For American officials, who regarded the Soviet Union internally weak and exhausted, communists in Europe and elsewhere were Moscow's willing proxies in its unyielding struggle against the capitalist West. Under Truman, the possibility for a constructive relationship with Stalin rapidly dis-

appeared and exploring possibilities for continued collaboration became pointless. In confronting Moscow the choice appeared to be between appeasement and an open-ended power contest.

There is every reason to believe that Stalin's plans for postwar Eastern Europe—his prize war booty—did not include Greece. The Soviet leader had accepted without discussion Churchill's deal for a division of the Balkans under which Greece alone was assigned to Britain's sphere. He had no desire to antagonize his western allies while the war was going on and it is conceivable that he might have agreed to Soviet participation in a tripartite mission to Greece had he been invited to do so. In that case, Moscow's involvement in a high-level allied presence in Athens might have persuaded the Greek communists to pursue their goals through political means rather than civil war, if the Soviet representative had taken a firm stand on the matter. On the other hand, having pocketed the deal offered by Churchill, Stalin was determined to impose his control on his share of Eastern Europe without interference from the West. It is therefore much more likely that he would have refused an invitation from Roosevelt to participate in a commission for Greece so as to avoid requests for reciprocity elsewhere. As already noted, in 1946 the Soviets refused to take part in the international supervision of the Greek elections and plebiscite. Before the end of that year the Greek communist leadership, without encouragement from Moscow, moved toward an armed show-down with its domestic adversaries. For his part, while careful not to become openly involved, Stalin made no attempt to restrain the Greek insurgents and permitted Moscow's "satellites" to provide them with whatever assistance they could deliver.

Stalin's response to a proposal for an Allied commission for Greece must therefore remain a matter of speculation. What is certain is that the idea was effectively still-born, having been killed before it could be presented to Moscow. As Churchill's messages to Roosevelt made clear, the British government refused to consider giving the Soviet Union any say in international efforts to restore political stability in postwar Greece and guide that country toward recovery. For Churchill and his principal advisers, Greece was the

cornerstone of British influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, a vital part of the life line of their embattled empire now increasingly threatened by the expansion of Soviet power.

In retrospect, the origins of Britain's efforts to prevent a communist victory in Greece can be traced back to 1943 and the rise of the Greek Resistance movement which the communists threatened to dominate. Before 1946, American observers had generally disparaged London's interventionist policies in Greece and attributed them to Britain's lingering imperialist traditions. For their part, by blocking the spread of communism in Greece, British officials saw themselves as defending not only their own strategic interests but the freedom and security of the majority of Greeks. In its rationale this policy was the embryo of the global strategy of containing the Soviet Union that the United States formally adopted in March 1947 under the Truman Doctrine and pursued throughout the cold war.

Neither a utopian dream nor a missed opportunity, the tripartite commission Ambassador MacVeagh suggested to President Roosevelt was a sensible tool of diplomacy which, if properly employed, could have defused the Greek crisis of December 1944 and might have established a precedent for postwar international cooperation elsewhere. To succeed such a tool needed the active support of all three partners. Its fate demonstrates that despite their wartime cooperation, the rivalries and mistrust that continued to divide the principal wartime allies were too deep to survive the defeat of their common enemy. MacVeagh's proposal for a tripartite commission for Greece was an early casualty of the cold war.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War III: The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

<sup>2</sup>Laird Archer, *Balkan Tragedy* (Manhattan, Kansas: American Military Institute, 1977), 56–58

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 58–59, 76–77.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph E. Persico, *Roosevelt's Secret War* (New York: Random House, 2001), 414; David Stafford, *Roosevelt and Churchill: Men of Secrets* (New York: Overlook

Press, 1999), 274–75; Petros Makris-Staikos, 'O *Anglos Proxenos*.' *O ypoploiarchos Noel C. Rees kai oi vretanikes mystikes yperesies. Ellada –Mesi Anatoli, 1939–1944* (Athens: Okeanida, 2011), *passim*.

<sup>5</sup>Susan Heuck Allen, *Classical Spies. American Archaeologists with the OSS in World War II Greece* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 298–9.

<sup>6</sup>US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1943, IV, 126–27.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 133–34.

<sup>8</sup>Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y., file FDRL OF 48 England 1943–45, Box 3. Cordell memos to President, Sept. 24, 1943, Jan. 19, 1944.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Stafford, 275.

<sup>11</sup>Christina Goulter-Zervoudakis, "The Politicization of Intelligence: The British Experience in Greece, 1941–1944," *Intelligence and National Security*, 13, 1 (Spring 1998), 183.

<sup>12</sup>In early June 1944, when Churchill, in a personal message to Roosevelt, asked for US support of British policy on Greece, he received a direct response from the president giving such support. At the time the Department of State knew nothing of the exchange. US National Archives, Department of State Records, RG 59, 868.01/6–544, Memorandum, Foy Kohler to Robert Murray, NEA, June 5, 1944.

<sup>13</sup>*FRUS*, 1943, IV, 152–54.

<sup>14</sup>*FRUS*, 1944, V, 186–88.

<sup>15</sup>John O. Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933–1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 583–85.

<sup>16</sup>Roosevelt Papers, Map Room Papers, Naval Aide's File. Balkan Countries. The president's memo of Feb. 21, 1944, had been prompted by a Feb. 18, 1944 dispatch from MacVeagh in Cairo, expressing strong opposition to US participation in joint operations with the British in the Balkans.

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 140–47; P.G.H. Holdich, "A Policy of Percentages? British Policy and the Balkans after the Moscow Conference of October 1944," *International History Review*, 9, 2 (1987), 29–47; Albert Resis, "The Churchill-Stalin Secret 'Percentages' Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944," *American Historical Review*, 83, 2 (1979), 368–87; Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Service, 1971), 150–53, 349–51.

<sup>18</sup>Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence. The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 184–200; John O. Iatrides, "Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy and Tactics in the Greek

Civil War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 7, 3 (Summer 2005), 13–16.

<sup>19</sup>Ivo Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 352–53; Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War. From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 24–26.

<sup>20</sup>Banac, *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Vladimir Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56–57.

<sup>22</sup>*FRUS*, 1944, V, 148.

<sup>23</sup>John O. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens. The Greek Communist "Second Round," 1944–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 212–13.

<sup>24</sup>Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, 660–61.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 662.

<sup>28</sup>*FRUS*, 1944, V, 145.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 149–50.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1944, V, 150–51.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 1944, V, 165.

<sup>32</sup>Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, 243.

<sup>33</sup>*FRUS* 1944, V, 173.

<sup>34</sup>*FRUS*, 1945, VIII, 99–101.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 203–4.

<sup>37</sup>In the end, elections preceded the plebiscite. The elections, held on March 31, 1946, were boycotted by the communists and resulted in a strongly conservative government. The plebiscite, held on September 1, 1946, returned King George to his throne. Observers from western countries (mostly Americans) supervised both events. The Soviet Union refused to participate in the supervision.

<sup>38</sup>Dennis Merrill, ed., *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*, 8, 1, "The Truman Doctrine and the Beginning of the Cold War, 1947–1949." (University Publications of America, 1996), 1–2.

<sup>39</sup>*FRUS* 1945, VIII, 1219–41; Walter Johnson, ed., *Joseph C. Grew, Turbulent Era. A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904–1945*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), II, 1470–73.

<sup>40</sup>Warren F. Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt. The Complete Correspondence*, III (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 579.

<sup>41</sup>*FRUS*, 1945, VIII, 205–6.

<sup>42</sup>Kimball, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 605–6.

<sup>43</sup>*FRUS*, 1945, VIII, 207–8.