

War and Peace in the Strategy of the Communist Party of Greece, 1945–1949

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Introduction

Studies of the strategy and tactics of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) during the Greek Civil War of the 1940s fall broadly into three categories. The traditionalist interpretation views the KKE as conspiring to seize power and force Greece into the Soviet camp.¹ The two other interpretations are revisionist and sympathetic to the Left, but they differ from one another in many details. One revisionist school believes in the “justice” of the KKE’s cause but focuses on the litany of “errors” committed by the party leadership that resulted in the defeat of the Left.² The other revisionist interpretation accepts the official position of the KKE that the party was left with no choice but to fight a “patriotic,” “anti-fascist,” and “anti-imperialist” war against “English imperialism and the indigenous plutocratic oligarchy.”³ All three interpretations are monolithic in their approach to the subject: They allow little room for the study of the diversification and gradual evolution of the strategy of the KKE, and they do not accurately periodize the events of the Greek Civil War.⁴

1. Indicatively only, see George Alexander, *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece 1944–1947* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1982). See also A. I. Korantis, *Politiki kai Diplomatiki Istoria tis Ellados 1941–1945*, Vols. 1–2 (Athens: Estia, 1987).

2. Again, indicatively only, see Heinz Richter, *British Intervention in Greece: From Varkiza to Civil War, February 1945 to August 1946* (London: Merlin Press, 1986); Giorgis Katsoulis, *Istoria tou Kommounistikou Kommatos Elladas*, Vol. 6: 1946–1949 (Athens: Nea Synora, 1977); and Pavlos Nefeloudis, *Stis Piges tis Kakodaimonias: Ta Vathytera Aitia tis Diaspasis tou KKE, 1918–1968*, Sixth ed. (Athens: Gutenberg, 1974).

3. Greek Communist Party (KKE), *Dokimio Istorias tou KKE*, Vol. 1: 1918–1949, 2nd ed. (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1996), pp. 621–622; and KKE, *I Trichroni Epopoia tou Dimokratikou Stratou Elladas, 1946–1949* (Athens: Rizospastis—Synchroni Epochi, 1998).

4. One notable exception is Peter J. Stavrakis, *Moscow and Greek Communism 1944–1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

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A more nuanced history of the KKE during the Civil War can now be written by using newly declassified materials from the archives in Athens and elsewhere, and by taking a fresh look at records that have been available for some time. This article focuses on the interplay between the concepts of war and peace in the evolution of Communist policy. It demonstrates that the choices facing the KKE changed quite dramatically—more than once—in the years from 1945 to 1949. The article discusses the interactions among KKE strategy, Soviet advice to the Communists, and the policies of the KKE's domestic and foreign adversaries. Unlike other analyses, this article seeks to examine the party's actions and initiatives in the light of both possible and impossible alternatives.

Continuities and Discontinuities in the Conception and Evolution of KKE Strategy, 1941–1947

The concepts of war and peace were virtually inseparable in the strategy of the KKE throughout the 1940s. During most of that period the party waged war to secure a compromise that would improve the terms of its participation in the Greek political process. In 1941–1944, when Greece was occupied by the Axis powers, the expansion and performance of the KKE-led National Liberation Front (EAM) furthered the social and political realignments that had begun in the 1930s. By 1944 the traditional power structures had been rendered obsolete, and a widespread desire had emerged for far-reaching changes in Greece's social, economic, and political structures. The EAM offered a vision of a radical transformation of Greek society, whereas the older political parties, including the monarchists (the Populist Party) and the republicans (the Liberal Party), wanted to proceed more cautiously. The Populists and Liberals received generous support from Britain, whose strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East necessitated a friendly postwar regime in Athens.

When liberation came in October 1944, the KKE did not initially try to seize power by force. Instead, relying on popular support for the EAM, the Communists sought to work within Greece's postwar political system, convinced that a political mobilization of the masses would allow them to impose their program by peaceful means.

When Britain and the EAM's Greek opponents attempted to diminish the influence of the EAM, a military confrontation broke out in Athens between the British forces and the EAM's military wing, known as the National People's Liberation Army (ELAS). The fighting lasted from December 1944 to January 1945. The contradictory impulses of nonviolent action and mili-

tary mobilization in KKE ranks resulted from the party's initial willingness to pursue legal forms of political struggle, an approach the Communists abandoned only when they realized that it was self-defeating. The KKE did not wish to cooperate with the forces in Greek society that it would later have to eliminate in order to effect a complete political, social, and economic transformation of the country.⁵

In this sense there was a major continuity between the strategies of the KKE in December 1944—January 1945, when it clashed with the British forces in Athens, and in 1946–1947, during the first phase of the Greek Civil War. During both phases the Communists evidently believed that a limited show of strength would suffice to secure a compromise and bring the party back to the leading position it had held prior to December 1944. What distinguished those two periods was the intervention of key events: the signing of the Varkiza Agreement on 12 February 1945 by the EAM and the British-backed Greek government, which ended the military confrontation and provided a framework for the peaceful evolution of Greek politics; widespread violations of this agreement by successive Greek governments, which sought to keep the Communists from gaining power; and, ultimately, the abandonment of the KKE's and EAM's hopes for a peaceful interval in which the Left could consolidate itself and dislodge the non-Communist parties.

Three days after the signing of the Varkiza Agreement, which called for the disarmament and demobilization of the ELAS as well as the surrender of its stockpiles of weapons, the KKE leadership instructed all party organizations to conceal large quantities of arms for use in “an hour of emergency that could present itself to us.”⁶ This measure was less a preparation for the launching of an armed attack at an opportune moment than a precautionary measure against the possibility of renewed violence on the part of the KKE's British and Greek adversaries. It is conceivable that the KKE was planning to resume armed action at some future point, but in early 1945 the party certainly had plenty of reason to be cautious and apprehensive about the intentions of its opponents. In the same telegram that ordered the concealment of weapons, the leadership also outlined the tasks that lay ahead for the Greek Communists: The party would focus its struggle on the restoration of demo-

5. Prokopis Papastratis, *British Foreign Policy Towards Greece During the Second World War, 1941–1944* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Thanasis D. Sfikas, *The British Labour Government and the Greek Civil War: The Imperialism of “Non-Intervention”* (Keele, UK: Keele University Press, 1994), pp. 15–42; Thanasis D. Sfikas, “‘The People at the Top Can Do These Things Which Others Can't Do’: Winston Churchill and the Greeks, 1940–1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 1991), pp. 307–332; and Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

6. Yiannis Ioannidis, *Anamniseis: Provlimata tis Politikis tou KKE stin Ethniki Antistasi, 1940–1945* (Athens: Themelio, 1979), p. 371.

cratic liberties, the pursuit of economic development, and the establishment of a broad democratic front. Whatever the precise reasons may have been for the KKE's secret retention of its weapons in February 1945, the party did not begin using them until eighteen months later. Until the late summer of 1946 the Greek Communists adhered to a policy that relied not on violence, but on political and industrial pressure. Moreover, even when the KKE resumed its armed campaign, it did not wholly abandon nonviolent means of struggle. The shift to violence did not signify a full breach with the quest for a peaceful solution and was motivated not by any shifting of the balance of power in the KKE's favor, but by the growing perception that political struggles alone could not work in a climate of repression and persecution. Thus, the notion that developments after the summer of 1946 were preordained by the order issued on 15 February 1945 is untenable. The policy of the KKE is understandable only if it is assessed within the rapidly evolving political context of 1945–1947.⁷

In late May 1945, after years of imprisonment in Dachau, the charismatic but autocratic Nikos Zachariadis, the secretary general of the KKE Central Committee, returned to Athens. Upon his arrival he publicly declared that the KKE did not aspire to a violent seizure of power. Instead, the party would try to win support among workers, peasants, and the lower and middle classes for a “bourgeois-liberal” transformation of the country.⁸ By the end of July 1945 the KKE and its minor political allies in the EAM (which now operated as a coalition of Leftist parties) had published a “Program of the People's Democracy,” which was essentially a moderate political document that downplayed any revolutionary intent or rhetoric.⁹

In June 1945 Zachariadis met with the U.S. and British ambassadors in Athens and offered them assurances that the KKE would compete for power by political means.¹⁰ On 5 June the KKE leader wrote an article in the Communist daily newspaper, *Rizospastis*, in which he advocated a Greek foreign policy that would take into account the regional strategic interests of both the Soviet Union and Britain, and he expressed support for an understanding with the British government.¹¹ At the Twelfth Plenum of

7. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 44, 63, 70–71.

8. Interview with Nikos Zachariadis, *Rizospastis*, 2 June 1945, p. 1. *Rizospastis* was (and still is) the Greek Communist Party's daily newspaper.

9. “To Programma tis Laikis Dimokratias,” 23 July 1945, in KKE, *Episima Keimena* (hereinafter referred to as *EK*), Vol. 6 (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1987), No. 704 and Appendix, pp. 388–395.

10. Public Record Office, London (hereinafter referred to as PRO), Foreign Office Files (FO) 371/48271 R9722: Leeper to Foreign Office, 5 June 1945; and John O. Iatrides, ed., *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933–1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 680–681.

11. Nikos Zachariadis, “Oi dyo poloi kai o ellinikos aksonas,” *Rizospastis*, 5 June 1945, p. 1.

the KKE Central Committee on 25–27 June, Zachariadis accused the British of running Greece like a colony, but he again insisted that Greece ought to reach an accommodation with both the Soviet Union and Britain.¹² These overtures adumbrated the radical proposal for the neutrality of Greece that he put forward in August 1946, a proposal he had contemplated for several years.¹³ In October 1945 the KKE's Seventh Party Congress made an appeal to the British government, threatened a boycott of the general elections scheduled for March, and reiterated the call made at the Twelfth Plenum for popular "self-defense" against monarchist violence. At the same time the KKE insisted on the "bourgeois-liberal" transformation of the country in accordance with the "Program of the People's Democracy."¹⁴

A shift in KKE thinking was first discernible in early 1946 after ten months of persecution by the British-backed governments in Athens. In January 1946, a KKE Politburo member, Mitsos Partsalidis, visited Moscow to discuss the situation in Greece and the strategy of the Greek Communists. Partsalidis told Soviet officials that the persecution of the Left and Britain's political and military presence in the country cast doubt on the prospects for a peaceful transition to normality and necessitated an "energetic counter-attack." He wanted to see whether Moscow would actively support an armed struggle, though he added that the Greek party should take advantage "of even the tiniest possibility for peaceful and democratic evolution."¹⁵ Partsalidis asked whether the KKE should undertake a violent insurrection against the regime in Athens or prepare an armed defense while seeking the political mobilization of the masses. Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov urged the KKE not to yield to provocations or ignite domestic

12. Zachariadis's speech on foreign policy at the final session of the 12th Plenum, in Vasilis Kondis and Spyridon Sfetas, eds., *Emfyllos Polemos: Egrafa apo ta Yiougoslavika kai Voulgarika Archeia* (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1999), No. 2, pp. 45–46; Zachariadis's Report at the 12th Plenum, 27 June 1945, in KKE, *Deka Chronia Agones, 1935–1945* (Athens: KKE Central Committee, 1945), pp. 272–275; and Political Resolution of the 12th Plenum, 30 June 1945, in KKE, *EK*, Vol. 6, No. 706, pp. 32–39.

13. Vaggelis Papanikos, *O Nikos Zachariadis sto Dachau* (Athens: Filistor, 1999), p. 80; and Thanasis D. Sfikas, "Anatolika tis Dysis kai Dytika tis Anatolis: Oi Ellinikes Epiloges, 1940–1949," in Asterios Argyriou, Konstantinos Dimadis, and Anthi Lazaridou, eds., *O Ellinikos Kosmos anamesa stin Anatoli kai ti Dysi, 1453–1981*, Vol. 2 (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 1999), pp. 133–139.

14. Extract from Zachariadis's speech at the Seventh Congress, 6 October 1945, in Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfyllos Polemos*, No. 3, pp. 47–48; Report and Final Resume of Nikos Zachariadis, 6 October 1945, in KKE Central Committee, *To Evdomo Synedrio tou KKE*, Vol. 3 (Athens: KKE Central Committee, 1945), pp. 21–26; and Political Resolution and Proclamation of the Seventh Congress, 6 October 1945, in KKE, *EK*, Vol. 6, Nos. 720 and 721, pp. 77–88, 89–94.

15. Ioanna Papanthasiou, "Pros ti Moscha me Syntrofikous Hairetismous," *O Politis*, No. 29 (13 December 1996), p. 32. See also Report of the KKE Central Committee, "On the Situation in Greece," sent by Georgi Dimitrov to the Soviet Union on 5 February 1946, in Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfyllos Polemos*, No. 72, pp. 172–175.

armed conflict that would provide a justification for the continued presence of British troops in Greece.¹⁶

On 12–15 February 1946 the Second Plenum of the KKE Central Committee reached a political decision to embark on military action that would initially remain defensive and would become offensive only if the search for a compromise failed.¹⁷ Although this decision confirms the inseparability of the concepts of war and peace in the strategy of the KKE, the latter ingredient may easily be overlooked or dismissed as a mere anomaly. In reality, it is impossible to understand one element without considering the other.

Despite the KKE's new orientation and the decision of the EAM coalition to boycott the elections, the Communists made two proposals to the Liberal prime minister, Themistoklis Sofulis, in March 1946: a two-month postponement of the elections and electoral cooperation between the EAM and Sofulis's Liberals; and an extension of the deadline for submitting lists of candidates so that the Left might increase its popular appeal by voting en bloc for the small party of the so-called leftist Liberals. Sofulis did not respond to either suggestion.¹⁸

In early April 1946 Zachariadis met in Sofia with Georgi Dimitrov, the long-time head of the Soviet-sponsored Communist International (Comintern) who had continued to serve as a liaison for Moscow with foreign Communist parties after the Comintern was disbanded in 1943. According to Dimitrov, the KKE leader informed him of the situation in Greece, the elections, and the condition of the KKE and EAM. The two men "agreed on mutual relations and cooperation in the future."¹⁹ Zachariadis also handed over some "brief notes on the political situation in Greece," which predicted that the domestic climate would deteriorate after the elections. Zachariadis reaffirmed "the position of peaceful development at home," but he also said that the KKE would "take concrete measures" for the forthcoming clash.²⁰ Even so, the Greek Communists apparently were still trying to keep their options open. In a meeting with the Soviet ambassador in Athens on 4 May 1946, Zachariadis explained that when the choice came down to civil war or participation in the elections of 31 March 1946, the party "opted for a third solu-

16. "Ellinosovietikes Scheseis tin periodo 1946–1949," [n.d., after November 1949], in Petros Antaios, *Nikos Zachariadis: Thytis kai Thyma*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Fytrakis, 1991), p. 451; Georgi Dimitrov, diary entry for 9 February 1946, in Spyros Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo to Aporrito Imerologio* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999), p. 173; and Note by Lavrishev, 23 January 1946, in Kondis and Sfetis, eds., *Emfylis Polemos*, No. 122, pp. 235–236.

17. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 85–87.

18. Statement by Nikos Zachariadis, *Rizospastis*, 7 March 1946, p. 1; and Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, p. 87.

19. Dimitrov, diary entry for 2 April 1946, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 173.

20. Papathanasiou, "Pros ti Moscha," p. 34.

tion, namely a boycott of the elections and the further conduct of the struggle with every possible means short of armed insurrection.”²¹ In August of that year Yiannis Ioannidis and Petros Rousos, both of whom were members of the KKE Politburo, arrived in Belgrade to meet with the Yugoslav and other “fraternal” parties to coordinate outside assistance to the KKE. Upon arriving, Ioannidis wrote a report on the Greek guerrilla movement, which, he claimed, “ought to be reinforced not to precipitate an armed insurrection, but to make life in the country difficult for the English.” He added that the KKE needed a guerrilla movement “for the protection of our forces and for the preservation of the morale of party and non-party members.”²² Then, in mid-September 1946, the KKE informed the “fraternal parties” that it aimed to raise a guerrilla force numbering 15,000–20,000. The KKE defined its long-term objectives as the overthrow of the monarchy and the expulsion of the British, and it advanced the radical concept of Greek neutrality under United Nations (UN) auspices.²³

On 6 February 1947 Zachariadis publicly stated that the KKE wanted the formation of a government that respected popular sovereignty, the restoration of democratic order, equality before the law, and free elections. The EAM offered the same explanation to the UN Commission of Investigation that arrived in Athens in late January 1947 to investigate the Greek government’s accusations that its Balkan neighbors were assisting the KKE and fomenting civil war.²⁴ Zachariadis added that the KKE wanted elections to be held by a government that would include the Center parties and the EAM. The KKE rejected a purely Center government because that had been tried under Sofulis in 1945–1946 and had failed even to curb the persecution of the Left. Nevertheless, a few weeks later, Zachariadis still claimed to see “some convergence” between the views of the Center and those of the KKE. The difficulty, he argued, lay in the former’s “inconsistency, oscillation, and tergiversation,” which he attributed to petty party considerations and pressure from the rightist flank of the Liberal Party. His conclusion, however, was not uniformly negative or pessimistic. He stated that, subject to a prior agreement, the KKE

would have no objection to entrusting the leadership and leaving the initiative for the solution of our political problems—in the direction of restoring normal

21. Note of a conversation between Rodionov and Zachariadis, 4 May 1946, in Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfylios Polemos*, No. 123, p. 237.

22. Report by Ioannidis on the guerrilla movement in Greece, 25 August 1946, in Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfylios Polemos*, No. 5, p. 50.

23. Report by Ioannidis to the fraternal parties, 12 September 1946, in *I Trichroni Epopoia*, pp. 585–597.

24. Statement by Nikos Zachariadis, *Rizospastis*, 6 February 1947, p. 1; Kyrkos’s speech to the UN Commission, 17 February 1947, Archives of Contemporary Social History, Athens (hereinafter referred to as ASKI): Michalis Kyrkos Papers, TK 3.

democratic order with free and honest elections—to the recognized leader of the Old Republican Center and leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Themistoklis Sofulis.²⁵

By this time, however, the KKE Politburo had already reached a momentous decision to give priority to its war effort and intensify the armed struggle. This decision, adopted in mid-February 1947, was first mentioned in Zachariadis's memorandum of 13 May 1947 to the Soviet leadership, entitled "On the Situation in Greece." The EAM and the KKE reiterated their unmitigated opposition to the British "occupation" of Greece and demanded the participation of the EAM in the government and the conduct of free elections. At the same time, the KKE showed itself optimistic and wanted to convert its guerrilla force, the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE), into a regular army.²⁶ This was a major shift in the KKE's strategy, but it is important to emphasize that it had already been explicitly proposed in the decision of the Second Plenum in February 1946. The shift was confirmed on 17 April 1947 when Zachariadis and Ioannidis sent their top-secret directive to the DSE commander, Markos Vafiadis. The DSE, they wrote, must become a regular army, and its aim must now be to set up a "people's democratic regime."²⁷

In a meeting with a high-ranking Soviet official, Andrei Zhdanov, in Moscow on 22 May 1947, Zachariadis detailed the situation in Greece, the decisions of the KKE, and the party's requirements in terms of outside assistance. Zachariadis claimed that the KKE was supported by a majority of the population in northern Greece, but the main urban centers and communication lines were controlled by the government and were well-fortified, beyond the reach of the DSE. "But it is not possible to allow this situation to continue any longer," Zachariadis added. The KKE had decided to "create a new situation" by occupying northern Greece and Thessaloniki. To accomplish that, the DSE would seek to recruit 50,000 guerrillas, a task for which Zachariadis requested Soviet assistance.²⁸

Although the shift toward war was indisputable, two actions suggest that the KKE was keen to stress the patriotic nature of its struggle and to tone down some of the provocative aspects. On 12 August 1947 Ioannidis cabled Vafiadis that the anniversary of the establishment of the DSE must be desig-

25. Statement by Nikos Zachariadis, *Rizospastis*, 1 March 1947, p. 1.

26. Zachariadis's memorandum to the CPSU leadership, 13 May 1947, in *I Trichroni Epoptoia*, pp. 608–615.

27. Zachariadis and Ioannidis's secret directive to Markos, 17 April 1947, ASKI, KKE Archives, TK 147, F=7/34/35.

28. "Simeiotoma tis syzitis tou s. Zhdanov me ton s. Nikolai [Zachariadis], [Moscow], 22/5/1947," edited by I. Papathanasiou, in *Prosopa, 21os Aionas*, No. 11, supplement to the Athens daily newspaper *Ta Nea*, 22 May 1999, pp. 12–13.

nated as 28 October to coincide with the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war of 1940.²⁹ A few days later, “to set an example and consolidate discipline,” Ioannidis sent Vafiadis an order for the arrest, trial, and summary execution of a DSE commander who had violated orders by crossing into and remaining on Albanian soil with his three battalions for a day.³⁰

During the initial period, from February 1945 to February 1946, the strategy of the KKE was based on peaceful means of struggle. But when this approach failed to bring the KKE to power, the party shifted its strategy. From February 1946 to February 1947, the KKE embarked on a guerrilla struggle to force the government to make certain concessions. The decision of February 1946 had explicitly stated that the KKE would not launch a full-fledged war unless the search for a compromise failed. Not until February 1947 did the KKE finally decide in favor of all-out war. To understand this decision, it is crucial to examine the policies and initiatives of the major non-Communist actors in Greece.

Domestic and External Challenges to KKE Policy: The Greek Liberals and Populists, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, 1945–1947

The Varkiza Agreement of February 1945, which had provided for the capitulation and disarmament of the Left after its defeat by the British in Athens in December 1944, had been followed by a crackdown on thousands of leftist Greeks by the security forces and the state apparatus. Even the Center government—which took office in late November 1945 under Sofulis—found it difficult to stop the clampdown.³¹ Zachariadis increasingly believed that his fears of a deterioration of the domestic situation after the March 1946 elections would be fully borne out.

In a statement before the Greek parliament on 17 May 1946, Konstantinos Tsaldaris, the Greek prime minister and leader of the monarchist and staunchly anti-Communist Populist Party, announced that the government would respond forcefully to the KKE’s armed campaign. He implied, however, that the government would not wait for the Communists to move. Tsaldaris justified the attacks on the Left by citing “the legacy of the past and especially the horror of the December [1944] events,” as well as the

29. “Dionysis” [Ioannidis] to Markos, 12 August 1947, No. 99, ASKI, KKE Archives, TK 147, F=7/34/96.

30. “Dionysis” to Markos, 1 September 1947, No. 108, ASKI, KKE Archives, TK 147, F=7/34/105.

31. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 71–88.

violence unleashed by the Communists against their opponents during the occupation.³² But this justification seems problematic. It may explain the violence waged against left-wingers in 1945–1946 by monarchist bands, but it fails to account for the persecution of republicans who had not been associated with the EAM and the KKE. Nor does it explain the numerous forms of intimidation and discrimination against leftists and republicans perpetrated by the state apparatus. It is telling that one of the most vociferous protests against “the terror of the extreme right” and “the suppression of every democratic wind” was issued in early June 1945 by Sofulis and four other centrist politicians, none of whom had been tainted by any association with the Communists.³³

Despite Sofulis’s condemnation of right-wing violence, the position of the Liberal Party was distinctly ambivalent after the elections of March 1946. In a reply to Tsaldaris’s statement before the parliament, Sofulis spoke about “the Communist peril” and denounced “the criminal activity” of the KKE, but he also launched a strong attack on the Populist government and the institution of the monarchy. At the end of his speech, he sounded a unifying note: “But despite these political and constitutional differences, there is also the rallying point, which unites us all into one national entity. There is Greece.”³⁴

Equally mixed sentiments were expressed by Sofulis’s two leading deputies, Konstantinos Rendis and Christos Ladas. In a statement before the parliament, Rendis said that Greeks were divided on the questions of the constitutional regime and Communism. The Liberal Party, he argued, supported the government in its stand against Communism but opposed it on the question of the monarchy. Rendis rejected the Populists’ claim that the king “will lead us all against the Communists. This is wrong. [The Communists] too are his subjects and will receive proper protection.”³⁵ Although this comment may have sounded conciliatory vis-à-vis the KKE, Rendis and Ladas soon expressed a less accommodating position. During the parliamentary discussion of the government’s anti-Communist legislation, which was passed as Resolution C, Rendis argued that the Liberals agreed with the government’s interpretation of the aims of the KKE and the need to stamp out Communism in Greece. The only difference, he said, was that the Liberals wanted the govern-

32. Parliamentary session, 17 May 1946, in *Episima Praktika ton Synedriaseon tis Voulis ton Ellinon* (hereinafter referred to as *EPSVE*), 13 May–20 June 1946 (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1946), pp. 12–16, quotation on p. 14.

33. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 43–50. The best discussion of Communist “enthusiasm, freedom and coercion” during the occupation is Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece*, pp. 265–339.

34. Parliamentary session of 18 May 1946, *EPSVE*, 13 May–20 June 1946, pp. 17–19.

35. Parliamentary session of 23 May 1946, *EPSVE*, 13 May–20 June 1946, p. 83.

ment to expose the KKE's duplicity by *first* allowing the Communists to launch a "revolution" and *then* suppressing the party.³⁶ Ladas, for his part, condemned the lawlessness caused by the "anarchists" of the KKE.³⁷

For the time being, however, the KKE refrained from sharp attacks on Sofulis and other Liberal leaders. On 10 July 1946 Zachariadis proposed an all-party agreement to restore law and order. Even the British ambassador in Athens thought that Prime Minister Tsaldaris might well be advised to accept the proposal, but he doubted that the Populist deputies would tolerate it. At the same time the centrist leaders rejected the KKE's appeal for a common front against the forthcoming plebiscite on the constitutional question. Evidently, the Liberals feared that they would be branded as fellow travelers if they actively cooperated with the KKE.³⁸ This came as a disappointment to Communist leaders, who had been heartened by Sofulis's vehement attack on the monarchy and the exiled King George II, who had helped establish the dictatorial regime of the "Fourth of August" 1936. On 20 June 1946 Sofulis had claimed that the government's proposal for a plebiscite on the return of the king would be "a coup d'état," a "humiliation," an "insult to the Greek people," and an outright endorsement of George II's support of dictatorship. Sofulis had affirmed that, in the new climate after World War II, the return of George II would cause Greece to be regarded as a "reactionary" European state.³⁹

On 25 July 1946 *Rizospastis* reported with apparent regret that on the previous day, during a conference of the leaders of the parliamentary parties, disagreements had emerged when Sofulis proposed a government of parliamentary and nonparliamentary parties and a policy of "appeasement."⁴⁰ Tsaldaris showed the limits of Populist goodwill by declaring that he was willing to grant the Left parliamentary representation without new elections, but only on the basis of the 9.3 percent that Allied observers claimed was the rate of politically motivated abstention from the elections of March 1946.⁴¹

Sofulis, on the other hand, proposed to the Populists a coalition government of Liberals and Populists, which would offer the DSE guerrillas amnesty and treat the Right and the Left equally. His proposals were rejected by the Populists, who considered it "absolutely unacceptable that this [appeasement] policy of the government [should] take the form of a capitula-

36. Parliamentary session of 17 June 1946, *EPSVE*, 13 May–20 June 1946, pp. 235–236.

37. Parliamentary session of 22 June 1946, *EPSVE*, 13 May–20 June 1946, p. 292.

38. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 111, 114–115.

39. Parliamentary session of 20 June 1946, in *EPSVE*, 13 May–20 June 1946, pp. 270–271.

40. News Report, *Rizospastis*, 25 July 1946, p. 1.

41. Statement by Konstantinos Tsaldaris, *Estia*, 27 July 1946, p. 1.

tion to the insurgents, as suggested by Mr. Sofulis.⁴² For their part, the Liberals insisted on “the need for a policy of appeasement in order to separate those motivated by political ideology from criminal elements, who, once isolated, will be crushed pitilessly and effectively.”⁴³ The same view was expressed in November 1946 by Ladas, who doubted that the state ought “to reply with special measures to a couple of rogues who talk of a democratic army when there is neither a democratic nor a royalist but only a national army.”⁴⁴

These statements prompted the KKE to regard the Liberals as “essentially inspired by the same anti-Communism, anti-Sovietism, and anti-Slavism [that motivate the Populists]. Despite their objections to the monarchy and the difference in tactics, [the Liberals] basically constitute a reserve in England’s sleeve.”⁴⁵ Nonetheless, when a new but essentially Populist government was formed in January 1947 under the retired banker Dimitrios Maximos and without the participation of the Liberals, the KKE was gratified.⁴⁶ Rendis explained that the Liberals’ decision to remain in opposition stemmed from the party’s belief that its political program differed from that of the Populists and that there should be three, not two, political “camps” in Greece. The Liberals, he added, “did not wish the opposition to consist only of the KKE.” On the eve of the formation of the new government, Sofulis launched a bitter personal attack on Tsaldaris, who was due to remain a key figure as deputy prime minister and foreign minister. Sofulis accused the Populist leader of having led Greece “to the brink,” and he stressed that Tsaldaris’s resignation and the adoption of a new political program were “a national necessity.” Sofulis warned, however, that Tsaldaris would not leave office: “It seems that he would rather allow Greece to sink with him as Prime Minister than enable Greece to survive without him as Prime Minister.”⁴⁷ A few days later Sofulis charged that the new Maximos government was set to transform its predecessors’ “dynamic” policy into a “superdynamic” one. This, he added propheti-

42. “Note,” 30 September 1946, Konstantinos Tsaldaris Papers, Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, Athens, File 11; Konstantinos Prinis, *Themistoklis Sofulis: Prothypourgos tis Ellados* (Athens: n.pub., 1994), p. 156.

43. Parliamentary session of 18 November 1946, *EPSVE*, 1 October 1946–27 February 1947 (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1947), pp. 724–725.

44. Parliamentary session of 22 November 1946 in *EPSVE*, 1 October 1946–27 February 1947, p. 770.

45. Report by Ioannidis to the fraternal parties, 12 September 1946, in *I Trichroni Epooiia*, pp. 585–597.

46. Statement of the KKE Central Committee, *Rizospastis*, 24 January 1947, p. 1; and Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 135–136.

47. Parliamentary session of 23 January 1947, in *EPSVE*, 1 October 1946–27 February 1947, pp. 929, 931–932.

cally, would be “truly a national misfortune,” because “the tranquility of the country shall remain elusive for an entire generation, sparking wild [and] inextinguishable hatreds that will plunge the Greek people into an abyss.”⁴⁸

Yet Rendis contributed to the perception of Liberal ambivalence by insisting that there were not two but three political camps in Greece. In explaining the differences between the Liberals, the Populists, and the KKE, Rendis argued that the Liberals would be willing to consider the Communists’ proposals for social policies that “favored the poorer classes,” but would not be willing to “sacrifice the freedom of the individual in the name of a chimerical economic justice.” Liberal disagreements with the Populists, he added, were also important: No “self-respecting state,” he claimed, could allow “the extreme right” to set up “paramilitary organizations . . . similar to the organizations of the Communists.”⁴⁹ The Liberals instead wanted to pursue an “appeasement” policy that would include a general amnesty.⁵⁰

Apart from Populist intransigence and Liberal ambivalence, the KKE also had to cope with the presence—or absence—of foreign powers, a factor that further limited the range of alternatives available to the Communists. In 1945–1946 Britain had not allowed Sofulis’s centrist government to restrain the security forces and the state apparatus in their campaign against the Left. After the elections of March 1946 the British had shown no desire to relax their hold on Greece and had sought to isolate the KKE through a Liberal-Populist coalition. The U.S. government shared Britain’s goal and, especially after the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, insisted that no Greek government could make any concessions to the KKE. In May 1947 Secretary of State George Marshall sent a confidential telegram to the U.S. embassy in Athens calling for “a more patriotic ideal of national unity” and warning that Washington “cannot look with favor on excesses of either extreme whether represented in the government or not.”⁵¹ Sofulis’s ambivalence and his refusal to participate in the government prompted the U.S. State Department to send Loy Henderson, the head of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, to Athens in late August 1947 to convey Washington’s “annoyance at Sofulis’s unwillingness to cooperate in a broad coalition government.”⁵² Upon arriving, Henderson warned the Greek

48. Parliamentary session of 28 January 1947 in *EPSVE*, 1 October 1946–27 February 1947, p. 942.

49. Parliamentary session of 29 January 1947, in *EPSVE*, 1 October 1946–27 February 1947, p. 952.

50. Parliamentary session of 29 January 1947, in *EPSVE*, 1 October 1946–27 February 1947, p. 956.

51. Marshall to U.S. Embassy (Athens), confidential telegram, 28 May 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, File 23A; and Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 71–88, 133–135, 158, 167–168.

52. Telegram from Dendramis (Washington) to Foreign Ministry, 28 August 1947, No. 543, Archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry, Athens (hereinafter referred to as AGFM), File 134 (2).

politicians that their political behavior “may create difficulties for American assistance.”⁵³

In the face of this pressure, Sofulis and Tsaldaris agreed on 4 September 1947 to form a coalition government that even the British Foreign Office viewed with suspicion.⁵⁴ Within a few days the U.S. authorities welcomed the new government’s “dual approach,” which consisted of a “generous amnesty” and “necessary military operations.”⁵⁵ To ensure the durability of the new political configuration in Athens, the U.S. State Department insisted that “on no account” should the governmental parties provoke a governmental crisis: If Sofulis and Tsaldaris had difficulties with one another, they should seek the mediation of Karl Rankin, the U.S. chargé d’affaires in Athens.⁵⁶

The influence of the British and Americans was magnified by the Soviet Union’s relative passivity. It is now well-documented that after May 1944 Moscow was fully aware of Britain’s aim to neutralize the EAM and the KKE both politically and, if necessary, militarily. In mid-October 1944, Dimitrov informed Molotov that the British “will spare no effort to put down the people’s movement in Greece” and that the Greek Communists would not submit to this “slavery.” Dimitrov predicted that the KKE “in all probability will continue the struggle for national liberation.” He recommended to Molotov that, in view of Greece’s “complicated international position,” military assistance from the Soviet Union would be “infeasible,” but that “moral support” for the KKE should be extended through the Soviet press.⁵⁷

In reality, Greece’s international position was not especially “complicated.” In July 1944 the Soviet government had indicated to Britain that it would not object to British control of Greek affairs if Britain would allow the Soviet Union a free hand in Romania and Bulgaria—a deal that was confirmed in a face-to-face meeting between Josif Stalin and Winston Churchill at the Kremlin on 9 October 1944.⁵⁸ The available evidence, or the lack

53. Telegram from Rodopoulos (Thessaloniki) to Tsaldaris and Pipinellis, 1 September 1947, No. 1395, AGFM, File 134 (2).

54. Chronological Table of the Principal Events, 25 January–7 September 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, File 28A/1, pp. 18–22; and Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 185–187. The coalition government consisted of ten Liberals and fourteen Populists, with Sofulis as prime minister and Tsaldaris as deputy prime minister and foreign minister.

55. Dwight Griswold, Head of the American Mission for Aid to Greece to Sofulis, 19 September 1947, AGFM, File 134 (2).

56. Dendramis (Washington) to Tsaldaris, 24 December 1947, No. 120, AGFM, File 134 (2); and Dendramis to Tsaldaris, 15 December 1947, No. 108, AGFM, File 134 (2).

57. Dimitris Konstatokopoulos and Dimitris Patelis, eds., *1931–1944: Fakelos Ellas. Ta Archeia ton Mystikon Sovietikon Ypiresion* (Athens: Nea Synora, 1993), No. 30, p. 109; No. 39, pp. 149–150; No. 41, pp. 152–197; No. 42, p. 198; quotations on pp. 195, 196, 198.

58. Albert Resis, “The Churchill-Stalin ‘Percentages Agreement’ on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (April 1978), pp. 368–387; Panos Tsakaloyiannis,

of it, suggests that Stalin kept the KKE in the dark on this issue.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the officers of the small Soviet military delegation that arrived at the ELAS headquarters in late July 1944 offered no direct encouragement when the KKE leadership mentioned the possibility of a clash with the British.⁶⁰ In December 1944, shortly after the outbreak of fighting in Athens, British and Greek officials asked the head of the Soviet delegation, Lieutenant-Colonel Grigorii Popov, what he thought of the KKE's actions. He shrugged his shoulders and replied that the Greek Communists had neither requested nor listened to Soviet advice.⁶¹

One possible explanation for Stalin's decision not to inform the KKE about the "percentages agreement" is that he was willing to allow the British to establish a precedent in Greece that would prove useful for Soviet interests in Eastern Europe.⁶² Although that made sense from the Soviet perspective, the KKE disregarded Moscow's warnings and demonstrated a considerable degree of autonomy by pressing ahead with a vigorous struggle against British influence in Greece. As always, Stalin was displeased when a foreign Communist party tried to act autonomously, and in January 1945 he told Dimitrov that the Greek Communists' military confrontation with the British in December 1944 had been "a foolish thing."⁶³ In early February 1946, as noted above, Molotov had advised the KKE to avoid armed conflict and to direct its energies instead to self-defense and political mobilization of the masses.⁶⁴ In September 1946, in a meeting with Dimitrov, Molotov, Zhdanov, and others in the Kremlin, Stalin further criticized the KKE, claiming that the party's abstention from the elections of March 1946 had been "an error" and "an ill-considered act" that had not resulted in the "failure" (presumably meaning the postponement) of the elections.⁶⁵

In May 1947, when Zachariadis visited Moscow to obtain Soviet backing and assistance for the realization of the new KKE plans, Zhdanov listened carefully, without expressing his own views or committing the Soviet Union.⁶⁶

"The Moscow Puzzle," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1986), pp. 37–55; and Yiannis Yiannouloupoulos, "To proto lathos toy Theou?" kai pali yia ti 'symfonia ton pososton,' Moscha, Oktovrios 1944," in Stefanos Papageorgiou, ed., *Aferoma sti mnimi tou Nikou Svoronou* (Athens: Panteio Panepistimio Koinonikon kai Politikon Epistimon, 1992), pp. 365–385.

59. Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfylios Polemos*, Introduction, p. 20; and Stavrakis, *Moscow and Greek Communism*, pp. 35–42.

60. Ioannidis, *Anamniseis*, pp. 248–259.

61. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, p. 35.

62. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, p. 353.

63. Dimitrov, diary entry for 10 January 1945, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 153.

64. Dimitrov, diary entry for 9 February 1946, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 173.

65. Dimitrov, diary entry for 2 September 1946, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 178.

66. See above, n. 28. A different account of this meeting is given in Vladislav Zubok and Constantine

According to Greek Communist records, Zachariadis then met with Stalin himself, who apparently raised no objections to the KKE's plans and may well have indicated to Zachariadis that Soviet assistance would be forthcoming. Without offering any details, the KKE Politburo claimed in early June that "we are entirely satisfied with the results of these talks."⁶⁷

Yet in the second half of 1947 the Soviet Union was faced with challenges that militated against providing wholesale assistance to the embattled KKE and risking a confrontation with the United States and Britain over Greece. In February 1948, during a meeting with Yugoslav and Bulgarian Communists at the Kremlin, Stalin even expressed doubts about the prospects of the KKE and wondered whether it might be wiser for the Greek guerrilla movement to "shrink." When his Bulgarian and Yugoslav guests pleaded with him to wait "a few months" until the chances of the Greek Communists became clear, Stalin replied: "Fine, then wait. You may be right." But, even though he did not oppose the struggle of the KKE in early 1948, he called for caution. On the question of the KKE's Provisional Democratic Government, which had been formed in late December 1947, Stalin told his guests that "the neighboring countries must be the last to recognize [it]. Let it be recognized first by the others that are further away."⁶⁸

Alternatives to KKE Strategy and Tactics? 1947–1949

A question that few scholars have considered is whether the KKE had a viable alternative to the course of action it pursued. In December 1946 *Rizospastis* accused Sofulis of appropriating the call of the Left for "reconciliation," renaming it "appeasement," and trying to implement it without the Left. Although the newspaper dismissed such actions as "an absurdity," it did not call for a stance against the Liberals. Instead, *Rizospastis* claimed that the Liberal

Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 127–128. According to the authors, "Zhdanov's response was a firm 'no.'" See p. 127.

67. Sfikas, *The British Labour Government and the Greek Civil War*, pp. 166–167. No documentary record of this second meeting has emerged so far; see also Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, p. 128.

68. Dimitrov, diary entry for 10 February 1948, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, pp. 201–205. The Bulgarian account of that meeting contradicts the substantially exaggerated version of Stalin's view given by the Yugoslav delegate Milovan Djilas in his *Conversations with Stalin* (London: Penguin, 1962), pp. 181–182. According to Djilas, Stalin believed that "the uprising in Greece has to fold up [and] must be stopped, and as quickly as possible." For a detailed discussion, see Leonid Gibianskii, "The Soviet Bloc and the Initial Stage of the Cold War: Archival Documents on Stalin's Meetings with Communist Leaders of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, 1946–1948," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 10 (March 1998), pp. 112–134.

Party contained individuals who truly believed in democracy, and it concluded that Sofulis himself was still capable of offering services to the nation.⁶⁹ But the Liberals' ambivalence, according to the newspaper, cast doubt on whether they would agree to an accommodation with the Left. When in April 1947 Sofulis called once more for a general amnesty, the minister of interior, Georgios Papandreou, rejected it on the grounds that this would "open the prisons and reinforce the [Communist] bands with first-class graduates of the Academy of crime." Rendis hastened to explain that the Liberals' political differences with the Populists "are of a theoretical character" and that the general amnesty was a measure designed to weaken, not strengthen, the guerrillas. Sofulis's lieutenant also acknowledged that if there were to be a peaceful settlement, "we are afraid that the KKE will not be sincere and will again attempt a new insurgency and a forceful seizure of power."⁷⁰

It was therefore not surprising when in June 1947 the KKE claimed that although it still distinguished between the Liberals and the Populists, it wanted the participation of the Left in government to be guaranteed. Because Sofulis's Liberal government had earlier failed to stop the attacks against the Left, the KKE claimed that a guarantee was now essential. Contacts ensued between EAM, Sofulis, and Prime Minister Maximos in Athens. After the announcement in late June 1947 of the KKE's intention to set up its own government in northern Greece, however, Sofulis was the only one who blamed the government and the Right for allowing "things to come to such a pass."⁷¹ This must have been the reason that the Left singled out Sofulis for a major peace initiative. A non-Communist member of the EAM Central Committee, Michalis Kyrkos, asked Dimitrios Lambrakis, the influential proprietor of the leading Greek liberal newspaper, who was a close associate of Sofulis, to take the initiative. Convinced that something was "brewing," the Populists sought to "ward off surprises," especially when they learned that the contacts between the EAM, Sofulis, and Maximos, who "still believe[d] in the possibility of an understanding," were continuing. Populist fears were reinforced on 18 July when Sofulis "categorically" denied rumors that he supported the EAM's proposals for a general amnesty and Greek neutrality.⁷²

69. Statements by the KKE Central Committee, *Rizospastis*, 13 December 1946, p. 1; and 20 December 1946, p. 1.

70. Parliamentary sessions of 24 and 29 April, in *EPSVE*, 21 April 1947–13 September 1947 (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1947), pp. 1102–1104, 1134, 1138–1141.

71. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 168, 169.

72. "Chronological Table of Principal Events, 25 January–7 September 1947," Tsaldaris Papers, File(F) 28, p. 13; Personal hand-written letters by Panos (Pipinellis) to Dinos (Tsaldaris), 12 and 16 July 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 23A; News bulletin, Athens, 18 July 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 23A; and Mihalis Kyrkos, *Piso Apo ta Kagkela: O Diogmos tis Ethnikis Antistasis* (Athens: Filistor, 1996), pp. 30–32.

Sofulis's ambivalence and the arrest of almost 14,000 leftists in Athens and Piraeus on 9–10 July angered the KKE. In a report to the Soviet Communist Party on 17 July 1947, a member of the KKE Politburo, Petros Rousos, claimed that the arrests had “essentially blocked the road to the pacification of the country and an agreement among all the parties.” The EAM issued a resolution stating that it would “exhaust even the last possibility for pacification,” but Rousos denounced Sofulis for allegedly having “played quite a double-faced role” in this regard. He claimed that on the eve of the arrests Sofulis had “obliquely” promised the EAM that he would contact the government to discuss the possibility of a compromise, but had subsequently stated that if the Communists proceeded with the formation of a provisional government, he would approve all measures recently taken by the Greek government. In the eyes of the KKE this meant that Sofulis “hastened once more to express his submission to the American orders, hoping that they will baptize him prime minister.”⁷³

In reality, Sofulis's attitude was even more hesitant than the KKE implied. By early August 1947 the Populists claimed that the Liberals “were orienting themselves more intensely” in favor of the dissolution of parliament and the formation of “a Government of their own”—a plan for which they were “expecting *a lot* of American support [emphasis in original].”⁷⁴ The situation was further complicated on 2 August 1947 when Sofulis once more “flatly” denied that the Liberals had accepted the EAM's proposals for a general amnesty, the withdrawal of foreign troops and missions, and Greek neutrality.⁷⁵ Yet that same day, Sofulis sent a note to the EAM with his “definitive decisions” regarding cooperation between the Left and the Liberals. He proposed to form his own government, with which the EAM would have to cooperate for a year. Within three months the DSE guerrillas would have to be disarmed and disbanded with some preconditions, including recognition of the national resistance movement against the Axis occupation, a general amnesty for “political offenses on both sides,” and the assumption of command in the armed forces by officers who enjoyed the confidence of all parties. Following the surrender of weapons, the government would be broadened to include two EAM representatives as ministers without portfolios, and then “the withdrawal of foreign troops shall be officially requested.” Municipal elections

73. KKE Report to CPSU, 17 July 1947, in *I Trichroni Epoptia*, pp. 621–632, quotations on pp. 622, 624.

74. Personal letter by Georgios N. Drosos, Assistant Minister for Press and Information, to Tsaldaris, 5 August 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 23A.

75. Greek Government, Office of Information, New York, Press Release, 3 August 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 23A.

on the basis of new registers would be held no later than three months after the surrender of arms, and the government would be broadened to include all parties in accordance with the election results. Then Sofulis would hand over the premiership to a person acceptable to all parties, and a plebiscite on the constitutional question and general elections for a new, “representative” parliament would follow.⁷⁶

On 6 August the EAM replied with a note that proposed the following modifications in Sofulis’s terms: a nine-month (rather than one-year) period of cooperation between the EAM and the new government; the surrender of arms to committees comprising individuals whom the Democratic Army could trust; the trial of collaborationist officers and the voluntary retirement of other officers; the allocation of the portfolios of Labor and Economics to the two EAM ministers; and a statement by the U.S. Economic Mission to the effect that it would not interfere with the political and military affairs of the Greek state and that its presence was aimed only at facilitating the implementation of the program for economic reconstruction. As for the elections, the EAM agreed with Sofulis’s plan but wanted the new parliament to have the power to revise the constitution. Finally, the EAM wanted to annul legislation on the purging of the civil service and to allow those removed for their Leftist sympathies to return to their posts.⁷⁷

The position of the KKE vis-à-vis contacts with the Liberals was that “any negotiation must be carried out by the appropriate bodies.”⁷⁸ The real alternative for the Communists was a settlement negotiated with a Center government *after* its formation. In May 1947 Zachariadis had written to the Soviet leadership that the KKE held to its demands for a new government with the participation of the EAM, a general amnesty, a cease-fire, and free elections: “Provided that the elections are free[,] the Democratic Army of Greece will subsequently decide about its future existence in agreement with the government that will emerge from the elections.”⁷⁹ But by the beginning of September 1947 the KKE abandoned attempts at compromise, arguing that Sofulis was heading what *Rizospastis* called “the grotesque government of superdynamic appeasement.” The KKE objected to the surrender of arms prior to an amnesty, claiming that Sofulis had become a prisoner of the Populists and the Americans. The EAM once more demanded the immediate sus-

76. Note by Sofulis to EAM, 2 August 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 23A.

77. Note by EAM to Sofulis, 6 August 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 24/3.

78. Letter from the Athens Section of Politburo to Politburo, 10 August 1947, ASKI, KKE Archives, TK 117, F=7/14/16.

79. Zachariadis’s Memorandum to the CPSU leadership, 13 May 1947, in *I Trichroni Epopoia*, p. 613.

pension of hostilities, a general amnesty, and the “equal” participation of the Left in the government.⁸⁰

By this point, however, the EAM sensed that its demands could be imposed only by force. Not only was this strongly implied in Zachariadis’s articles in the monthly military and political journal of the DSE headquarters, *Dimokratikos Stratos*,⁸¹ it also was articulated on two other occasions: on 4 August 1947, when the DSE military commander, Markos Vafiadis, informed the Yugoslav leadership that the DSE’s military objective was “to transform the situation radically and force [the opponent] into [a] compromise”⁸²; and on 21 February 1948, when Zachariadis told Yugoslav leaders Josip Broz Tito and Edvard Kardelj that “if we succeed in breaking up the offensive that the enemy is preparing, we will be able to force them into concessions before the elections.”⁸³ After the formation of the Liberal-Populist coalition government in September 1947, the KKE believed that it was running out of alternatives. The party’s own inclination to use force was strengthened by certain actions of the new government. When, for example, the government announced its amnesty proposals, even the British Foreign Office considered them fit “only for sneaks and betrayers.”⁸⁴

The option of using violence seemed especially propitious in light of the uneasy and tense relationship between the Populists and Liberals in the new government. The constant friction between the two parties, the frequent government crises, and the ever-present danger of political collapse in Athens encouraged the KKE on its new course. On 27 September 1947 the Athens section of the KKE Politburo noted that “a fight is being conducted secretly and in the open between the two parties.” Although the Populists were trying “to hold on to their positions,” the Liberals were struggling “to create a party” by

80. Kostas Karagiorgis, “I gennisi enos teratos,” *Rizospastis*, 7 September 1947, p. 1; and Kostas Karagiorgis, “Yperdynamikos Katevnamos,” *Rizospastis*, 9 September 1947, p. 1. See also the statements of the KKE Central Committee in *Rizospastis*, 10, 11, 12, 13 September 1947, all on p. 1; and Resolution of the EAM Central Committee, *Eleftheri Ellada* [daily EAM newspaper], 12 September 1947, p. 1.

81. “Meros apo to logo tou Nikou Zachriadi sti syskepsi ton kommatikon, politikon kai stratiotikon stehelon tou DSE,” *Dimokratikos Stratos*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (February 1948), pp. 26–32; “Laikos Epanastatikos Stratos,” *Dimokratikos Stratos*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (April 1948), pp. 107–112; “Brosta se mia apofasistiki kambi,” *Dimokratikos Stratos*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (August 1948), pp. 270–276; “Pou vriskomaste kai ti prepei na kanoume,” *Dimokratikos Stratos*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (October 1948), pp. 374–376; “Ta aposynthetika phenomena mesa sto monarchofasismo kai to diko mas kathikon,” *Dimokratikos Stratos*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (November 1948), pp. 431–440; and “Ta provlimata tis stratigikis kai technikis mas ston chrono pou mas perase,” *Dimokratikos Stratos*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (April 1949), pp. 207–216.

82. Markos Vafiadis’s letter to the Yugoslav leadership on the tactics of the DSE, 4 August 1948, in Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfyllos Polemos*, no. 16, p. 72.

83. Protocol of a conversation between Tito, Kardelj, Zachariadis, and Ioannidis, 21 February 1948, in Kondis and Sfetas, eds., *Emfyllos Polemos*, No. 36, p. 121.

84. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 185–186.

attracting members of the state apparatus and even trying “to recruit from the camp of the Left.”⁸⁵ The Populists immediately accused the Liberals of treating the coalition “as a means and not as an end.” The assistant minister of press and information, Georgios Drosos, warned Tsaldaris against the “vigorous pressure by the left wing of the [Liberal] Party and the Lambrakis group in the direction of following a more left-wing policy,” which amounted to “a permanent appeasement regime.” From the outset, therefore, the Populists were “discontented” with the actions of the Liberals.⁸⁶ The deputy foreign minister, Panayiotis Pipinellis, confirmed Populist suspicions when he informed Tsaldaris of a plan by Sofulis, other Liberal ministers, and Lambrakis “to impose dynamic solutions,” for which “they are in contact with the Communists in daily meetings.” At the same time, some Liberal deputies were putting pressure on Sofulis to dissolve the government on the grounds that the “policy of appeasement was failing,” a failure they blamed on the Populist Party. But Sofulis was “still adhering to the policy, saying that he respects his written promise to [Loy] Henderson.” In the same cable, Pipinellis had warned Tsaldaris that the security situation was deteriorating.⁸⁷ Indicative of the dislocation, paralysis, and dearth of ideas in Athens in late 1947 and early 1948 was the proposal by a center-right politician, Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, to send the entire male offspring of the families of the ruling classes to the front line.⁸⁸

The KKE’s shift to all-out war was further accelerated on 14 February 1948, when British and U.S. officials in Athens told the Greek government that if Greece were to survive, the DSE guerrillas “must be crushed in a decisive manner within the next six or seven months.”⁸⁹ The Greek government agreed with this view, but the following month it also considered a compromise, probably because of a lack of confidence in the ability of its army to defeat the DSE. Tsaldaris again stated that the Greek question could be solved only by direct agreement at the highest international level, as he had suggested to the foreign ministers of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union in New York in December 1946. On 22 March 1948 the Greek deputy prime minister and foreign minister proposed to make a direct appeal to the Soviet government, the UN Security Council, and the foreign ministers of the four great powers for a “sweeping solution” to the Greek crisis. The appeal, which was addressed mainly to the Soviet Union, was intended to demonstrate that

85. Letter from “Smaro” to Politburo, 27 September 1947, ASKI, KKE Archives, TK 117, F=7/4/19.

86. Letter by Drosos to Tsaldaris, 28 September 1947, Tsaldaris Papers, F 23A.

87. Draft telegram by P[ipinellis] to [Tsaldaris], 3 October 1947, No. 42361, AGFM, File 134 (2).

88. Parliamentary session of 6 November 1947, in *EPSVE*, 1 November 1947–23 January 1948 (Athens: Ethniko Typografeio, 1948), p. 21.

89. Translation of a Memorandum, Top Secret, 14 February 1948, Tsaldaris Papers, F 31.

Greece preferred “to live in amity rather than suspicion . . . with such a great world power as Soviet Russia.” Tsaldaris proposed that Stalin could state that he preferred to witness the victory of Communism “through peaceful democratic means and popular elections rather than by armed revolutionary tactics,” a formulation that would not imply that the civil war in Greece had been instigated by Moscow. Tsaldaris also proposed the surrender of DSE arms “to a neutral force of American, British, French, and Russian soldiers.” According to the plan, the guerrillas who surrendered could choose between emigrating, remaining in Greece “under guaranteed police protection,” or resettling “in other Greek towns where they are not personally known.” A “wide and liberal amnesty” would be granted to all guerrillas and political prisoners, and three months after the surrender of arms there would be elections under international supervision. “Then,” Tsaldaris added, “if by regular democratic methods and arguments the Greek people want to elect Communists to the majority or [give them] strong representation in the National Assembly[,] the Communists are welcome to it.” Finally, the Greek deputy prime minister and foreign minister offered to grant Yugoslavia and Bulgaria—two countries that were assisting the KKE—free customs zones in the port of Thessaloniki under new treaties that would allow them access to the Aegean Sea.⁹⁰

In the summer of 1948, however, the Greek government returned with a less generous plan, which envisaged an official statement by the KKE and the DSE headquarters that they would halt the insurgency and surrender DSE arms to a special subcommittee of the UN Special Committee on the Balkans. This would be reciprocated by a suspension of deportations, “an amnesty of a broad scope,” and protection of those who surrendered. Then, within six months of the termination of military operations, the Greek government would hold elections for a new parliament. The sticking point, however, was that a general amnesty covering the members of the KKE’s Provisional Democratic Government, the members of the KKE Central Committee, and the commanders of the DSE would have to be decided by the parliament that would emerge from the elections. The Communists would be barred from participating in the election process, because the question of the legalization of the KKE would have to await action by the new government.⁹¹

Although the March 1948 plan might have served as the basis for discussion, the subsequent proposal was clearly unacceptable to the KKE. It would have prevented the party from participating in the elections and would have left the Communists without a leader during the crucial period in the run-up

90. Draft telegram by P. Leacacos, staff correspondent, Athens, 22 March 1948, Tsaldaris Papers, File 31.

91. Unsigned, undated hand-written peace plan, [summer] 1948, Tsaldaris Papers, F 31.

to the elections. In any case, there is no evidence that either of these two plans ever reached the KKE. From Soviet sources it is known that in the summer of 1948 Tsaldaris was discussing the possibility of a compromise with the Soviet embassy in Athens. These contacts were abruptly terminated for unknown reasons, but there is no doubt that the United States and Britain had made it abundantly clear to Tsaldaris that they were opposed to any contacts between the Greek government and the Soviet Union.⁹²

In addition, the Greek government seemed to have greater confidence about its own prospects. Whereas the government doubted its military capacity in March 1948, its less generous proposals of the summer may have been prompted by rumors in Athens that the KKE would be willing to lay down its arms if it could be legalized under a different leadership and if some five hundred “protagonists of the current rebellion and their families would be allowed to go abroad.”⁹³ In reality, the KKE, far from being ready to compromise, was prepared to continue the fighting. In June 1948 Zachariadis told Georgi Dimitrov that “there are [auspicious] conditions for the continuation of the [armed] struggle,” and the two men “agreed on the essentials” of the assistance needed by the KKE.⁹⁴ The momentum toward all-out war increased the following month when the Greek Army General Staff claimed that unless urgent measures were taken, it would be impossible to halt the war and defeat the DSE.⁹⁵ Amplifying on this point, the minister of the air force warned that after June 1948 the nature of combat operations had changed: The army had previously been confronted by unfortified and mostly mobile targets, but the DSE was now entrenched in “fortified positions in static fronts, supplied with a respectable quantity of anti-aircraft guns.”⁹⁶

Soon thereafter, on 22 July 1948, the minister of war warned Sofulis and Tsaldaris that problems had arisen because the government army had concentrated all its forces on Communist strongholds in the north without having first fully cleared up central and southern Greece. As a result, the DSE was launching diversionary operations in several parts of the country. According to the minister of war, this meant that “the battle . . . will not end as quickly as had been anticipated at the outset. The [DSE-]occupied territory is very strongly fortified.” The slow advance of the government army came at the price of being further away from supply bases and communication lines.

92. Sfikas, *British Labour Government*, pp. 223–225.

93. Telegram by Drosos to Tsaldaris, 5 July 1948, No. 4064, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1.

94. Dimitrov, diary entry for 11 June 1948, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 208.

95. “Evaluation of the Military Situation in mid-July 1948,” by Lt.-General St. Kitrilakis, deputy chief of operations of the Greek General Staff, n.d., Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1.

96. Top secret and personal memorandum by the minister for the airforce to the Supreme National Defence Council, 21 July 1948, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1.

Without adequate support, the army was unable to deploy its field artillery and was forced to depend solely on lighter mountain artillery, which was insufficient to secure a final victory. Furthermore, the widespread use of antipersonnel mines by the DSE was inflicting serious damage on government troops. All of this, combined with the “fatigue” of the army, raised fears that the battle would not be over by the end of August 1948. In that event, the war minister called for priority to be given to the clearing of southern and central Greece to ensure that popular morale would remain high and to prevent further governmental instability and crisis.⁹⁷

Two months later, when it had become clear that the government had failed to destroy the DSE in the north, the war minister demanded that troops be deployed to wipe out resistance in government-held territory in order to destroy the “myth” that this was a “civil” war and to avoid handing Greece over to the guerrillas for a third successive winter.⁹⁸ The situation was perilous enough to warrant a three-day visit to Athens by U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall in mid-October 1948. Initially the visit “strengthened the morale of the people and heartened the army,” but within days of Marshall’s departure the DSE stepped up its activity in southern Greece and dealt “a serious psychological blow” to public opinion, causing alarm within the government.⁹⁹ This setback helped spark a major government crisis, which was eventually resolved in late November with the reconstitution of a coalition government that survived in parliament by a single vote.¹⁰⁰ Even the Populists admitted, however, that the controversy was likely to have negative consequences abroad if “enemies of Greece” would “find in the last vote in Parliament many arguments to prove that the Government does not represent even the majority of the ‘monarchofascist’ clique [of] Athens.”¹⁰¹

The fragility of the political set-up in Athens gave the Greek Communists further encouragement. In December 1948, in a meeting between a KKE envoy and leading Bulgarian Communists, the prospects of the KKE

97. Top secret and personal memorandum by the minister of war to Sofulis and Tsaldaris, 22 July 1948, No. 809546, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1.

98. War minister to Sofulis and Tsaldaris, 13 September 1948, No. 809675, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1.

99. Telegrams by Stefanopoulos to Tsaldaris, 19 and 27 October 1948, Nos. 54262 and 54957, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1.

100. Telegrams by Stefanopoulos to Tsaldaris, 29 and 30 October 1948, Nos. 9074, 55166, 55481, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1; Telegram by Sofulis to Tsaldaris, 11 November 1948, No. 57082, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1; Telegram by Mavromichalis and Londos to Tsaldaris, 12 November 1948, No. 57087, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32/1; and Telegram by Tsaldaris to Permanent Deputy Foreign Minister, 21 November 1948, No. 58301, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32.

101. Urgent telegram by Pipinellis to Tsaldaris, 22 November 1948, No. 1622, Tsaldaris Papers, F 32.

were judged to be “favorable,” and agreement was reached “on [the] specific assistance we must give in the future, too.”¹⁰² The following month, Zachariadis himself “gave [Dimitrov] information on the situation in Greece.” In contrast to the upbeat assessment of the previous month, the “prospects [in January 1949 were deemed to be] not bad.”¹⁰³ Although there is no direct evidence that this change of tone reflected Communist anxiety about the government’s success in launching a major offensive against DSE forces in southern Greece in December 1948, the connection seems plausible. Apart from the military implications of the campaign, the KKE by the beginning of 1949 was left with a stark choice between unconditional surrender and the continuation of the war under increasingly adverse circumstances. The Greek Communists were eventually defeated in August 1949, but even in retrospect their defeat appeared to be increasingly likely only after the winter of 1948.

Epilogue

Friedrich Engels once claimed that “insurrection” is “an art” and is “subject to certain rules of procedure” that, if not observed, can lead to failure. The first rule, according to Engels, is never to take action unless one is determined to face the full consequences. The second rule is that, once an insurrection has been launched, the insurgents must be relentless and must seize the offensive. From this perspective, defense means disaster. The insurgents must catch the enemy by surprise and must capitalize on their initial successes to bolster their morale and attract wavering elements to their side.¹⁰⁴ The KKE observed the first rule but not the second. This lapse was attributable not only to the party’s initial hopes of finding a compromise, but also to the Soviet Union’s reluctance to give its blessing to armed action in 1946.

In assessing the conception and evolution of KKE strategy, it is crucial to take account of the motives and actions of the party’s opponents. It is also crucial to distinguish between the phases of the Greek Civil War. The choices facing the Communists changed substantially even within the narrow confines of 1945–1949. Later on, Zachariadis claimed that in the early stages of the conflict the KKE was hoping to “persuade” the Center that the Com-

102. Dimitrov, diary entry for 30 December 1948, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 218.

103. Dimitrov, diary entry for 19 January 1949, in Kouzinopoulos, ed., *Selides Apo*, p. 219.

104. Friedrich Engels cited in Stephen Neumann and Mark von Hagen, “Engels and Marx on Revolution, War, and the Army in Society,” in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 267.

unist cause was just.¹⁰⁵ Contemporaneous evidence lends weight to this assertion. In 1945–1947 the KKE tried to keep its options open and appeared to place some hope, if only tentatively, on the mediation of the old republican center under Sofulis. From the KKE’s perspective, the Liberals’ fluctuations and “democratic inconsistency” in 1946–1947 meant that they were not a trustworthy alternative to the Populists. The KKE’s growing disillusionment with the Liberals was one of the reasons that the Communists decided to escalate the conflict in February 1947.

The strategy of the KKE during the civil war, and arguably throughout the 1940s, revolved around the competing concepts of war and peace. War was waged after 1946 to restore the party to the position it had enjoyed before December 1944. Until early 1947 the KKE emphasized the pursuit of a compromise, and it used the threat of insurrection to bring additional pressure to bear on the government. But even when the Communists sought a compromise, they were haunted by the ghost of the Varkiza Agreement, which had been aimed at their capitulation. The KKE was determined to ensure that new negotiations and peace proposals would not end in capitulation. Thus, in 1947 the party stepped up its war effort in order to force a settlement. The alternative to war was a capitulation under conditions and terms infinitely worse than those of February 1945.

The unwillingness of the Soviet Union to furnish large-scale assistance, and the support provided to the anti-Communist forces by Britain and the United States, created extremely unfavorable conditions for the KKE. The party understood that guerrilla warfare rarely wins wars in a military sense, and it therefore switched to positional warfare after late 1947. The implications of this pivotal decision are difficult to pinpoint in the absence of a full-scale military analysis of the Greek Civil War, but there is little doubt that the prolongation of the war beyond 1949 would have rendered even more precarious the position of the KKE’s domestic rivals. In fact, the relevant evidence suggests that until the autumn of 1948 the possibility of a compromise could not be wholly ruled out. That option, however, was not entirely in the hands of the Greeks.

105. Nikos Zachariadis, *Provlímata tis Krisis tou KKE* (1962), republished as *I Paranomi Brosoura tou Nikou Zachariadi* (Athens: Glaros, 1987), p. 33.