

AMERICA'S RELATIONS WITH GREECE TO 1945: FROM ALOOF SOFT POWER TO THE ONSET OF REGIONAL HARD POWER

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The interest and involvement of the United States in Greek affairs began a slow trajectory from rather peripheral in the early nineteenth century to a level of increased concern by the end of World War II. But even by the beginning of 1945, as the following comments will try to point out, projections pointed to a limited regional presence for the United States, essentially a continuation of softer, relatively idealistic policy objectives. By early 1947, however, a dramatic reorientation would manifest itself, and not just for US relations with Greece.

We must start at the beginning. George Washington in his 1796 Farewell Address had advised American abstention from European political and military entanglements. The level of American contact with the more distantly located, Ottoman-dominated Balkans developed even more slowly than that with other European regions during the nineteenth century. If any official American policy existed toward the problematic Eastern Question with its accompanying great power rivalries, it was that, in the issue of the Turkish Straits, freedom of the seas and therefore freedom of transit and navigation in the Straits should prevail both for naval and commercial vessels.¹

The first Balkan people to attract the significant attention of America were the Greeks. As was the case with Europeans, many Americans reacted with great sympathy for the Greeks in their war for independence against the Ottoman Turks, which began in the early spring of 1821. Viewed as true descendants of their glorious Classical forebears, the Christian Greeks, according to standard accounts, had suffered long under the oppressive rule of the Muslim Turks and now were fighting bravely to acquire their freedom. Philhellenic feelings spread among educated people influenced by their extensive exposure to Classical Greece in their schooling. Politicians also responded to the symbolic proportions of this struggle thousands of miles away, a campaign for liberation quite similar in spirit to that experienced by Americans several decades earlier. President James Monroe in his annual message on December 3, 1822 remarked: "The mention of Greece fills the mind with the most exalted sentiments and arouses in our bosoms the best feelings of which nature is susceptible A strong hope is entertained that these people will recover their independence and resume their equal station among the nations of the earth."²

Despite strong popular feelings for the Greek cause and the mobilization of

support among private citizens (e.g., Samuel Gridley Howe), the American government remained committed to its traditional policy of nonintervention in Europe's political affairs. The promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine in December 1823 reinforced this stance, since Washington was, in turn, concerned about European incursions into Latin America. Commercial circles benefitting from increased trade with the Ottoman Empire also worked to check America from speaking out officially in support of the Greeks. In protest against such attitudes Henry Clay fumed: "A wretched invoice of figs and opium has been spread before us to repress our sensibilities and eradicate our humanity."³

The Greeks did gain their independence by the end of the decade with the military and diplomatic help of Britain, France, and Russia. Concurrently, a general pattern for Washington's policy towards the Ottoman Empire and its nationalities had been established and would remain intact until the Empire's fall during World War I. American citizens as individuals could express their support in words, money, and even involvement in combat for rebellious peoples rising up against their Turkish overlords, but Washington would adhere to a policy of strict noninterference in Ottoman affairs.⁴

Apart from commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean, Americans also came to the region as missionaries. Founded in 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions started sending missionaries to the Ottoman Empire in 1819. The numbers and activities of these Protestant emissaries increased during the remainder of the century. Confronting insurmountable obstacles in attaining their original objective of converting Muslims to Christianity, the missionaries turned to revitalizing and regenerating the "decadent" Christians of the Empire; and in the Balkans this meant the Greek Orthodox subject nationalities. They advanced their evangelical mission by establishing churches, by translating and distributing the Protestant Bible, and most successfully by providing access to missionary hospitals, dispensaries, and schools.⁵

Commercial and missionary activities would prevail over diplomacy and politics in American associations with the Eastern Mediterranean region into the next century. The United States moved slowly in establishing substantive diplomatic relations with the new Balkan regimes that emerged during the nineteenth century after breaking away from Constantinople's domination. Greece received the first American diplomat in the Balkans in 1868, nearly four decades after the Greeks gained their independence. Diplomatic correspondence from the Balkans to the State Department for the tense years immediately preceding World War I indicates a superficial knowledge of complex regional conditions. A partial explanation for this failing lies in the naming of political appointees to multiple diplomatic posts.

Interestingly, Washington did involve itself in a regional squabble in 1914 but emerged unscathed. In the aftermath of major territorial losses in the Italo-Turkish War (1911) and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the Ottoman Empire pursued a policy to strengthen its weak navy. In December 1913 Constantinople succeeded in purchasing the British-built dreadnought, *Rio de Janeiro*, originally constructed for Brazil, and actively sought other large vessels. The Greeks hastened to find capital ships in order to meet the threat of Turkish naval superiority and to secure their hold on Aegean islands taken from the Turks during the victorious Balkan Wars. The very tight market

forced the Greeks to search far and wide for sellers.

Athens finally found two 13,000-ton pre-dreadnought battleships in the United States. The *Idaho* and *Mississippi* had been completed in 1908 but were already considered outmoded and too slow for American purposes. Since Congress appeared reluctant to allocate extra money to the Navy Department, it was anticipated that funds from the sale of the battleships would be used for the construction of a new 30,000 ton super dreadnought. Through diplomatic channels in Washington the Turks loudly protested this proposed transaction. From Athens, Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos persuasively communicated to President Woodrow Wilson that these two ships would be used by Greece only to assure the maintenance of peace and the preservation of the balance of power in the Aegean. The sale was completed in late June 1914, and the ships were renamed the *Kilkis* and *Limnos*.⁶ Having brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of war, the Aegean island issue receded into the background with the outbreak of World War I in late July. It's significant to note that Washington in an unprecedented initiative had sold armaments to a European state engaged in a regional dispute.

Far tougher decisions with graver consequences loomed on the immediate horizon for America with the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914. Ultimately, and after some delay the United States became directly involved in April 1917, and its participation contributed mightily to the war's close in the fall of 1918. America's world role, so recently augmented by its physical involvement in war on the European continent, was expected to continue into the postwar era. Wilson's idealistic agenda with its emphasis on national self-determination would confront many difficulties at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, particularly those stemming from the secret treaties signed by the victorious allies during the war. In the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean, Wilson's policy objectives encountered the expansionist ambitions of Italy. Outraged at Wilsonian policies, the Italian delegation temporarily stormed out of negotiations in Paris in late April 1919 for ten days. Greece would benefit from Italo-American feuding. Partly to curb Italian inroads in Asia Minor while Turkey's fate was being decided in Paris, Wilson, in a turnaround from earlier positions, agreed with Britain's David Lloyd George and France's Georges Clemenceau during Italy's absence from Paris that Greek troops be authorized to land in Smyrna during mid-May 1919. Ostensibly to insure the maintenance of order, the Greek military presence initially augured well for the transfer of the Smyrna district with its large Greek population to Greece in the final treaty with Turkey. But by the time the conferees in Paris arrived at final decisions for East Central and Southeastern Europe in 1920, America's role, prestige, and influence had diminished. Wilson had experienced a physical collapse in September 1919, and the U.S. Senate had voted down the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles in November.

Having involved itself militarily and politically in European affairs in an unparalleled fashion, America quickly sounded a retreat from Wilsonian activism. Supported by domestic sentiment, Washington's policy makers in the period up to the outbreak of World War II pursued a general course directed at distancing America from foreign embroilments.

As was the case earlier, Greece tended to attract greater American attention than

the other Balkan states. Thus, philanthropic ventures continued and heightened because of disastrous developments for Greek interests in Asia Minor. The combination of shifting domestic politics in Greece and dwindling Allied support for the Greek military presence on Turkish soil contributed to the victory of Mustafa Kemal's nationalist forces in September 1922. The influx of more than one million refugees into Greece, who fled initially from Turkish forces or were included in the mandatory exchange of populations provided for by the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923), placed an overwhelming burden on Greece's meager resources.

America's retreat from active involvement in the Paris Peace Conference's decision making and its general aloofness to Greece's plight in Asia Minor had added to the problems of the Greeks. However, at the time of the rushed retreat by the Greek army and Smyrna's takeover by the Turks in the late summer of 1922, which caught innocent Greek and Armenian civilians in its wake, American diplomats, naval units, and relief agencies participated in the evacuation of thousands of refugees and provided them with food and medical care. The American Red Cross and Near East Relief raised money and served initially as the main relief organizations in Greece, although still other groups participated in the difficult task of alleviating the misery of hundreds of thousands of refugees.⁷

During the interwar years American economic interests in Greece would become fairly widespread, to the extent that by 1929 the United States had risen to first place as a source of Greek imports and as a market for Greek products. The impact of the Depression, however, altered the pattern of the 1920s, and trade relations between the two countries shifted downward. Still another category reflecting a strong American role in Greece was financial backing for a number of public works contracts. American governmental and private financing totaled \$95,000,000 from 1924 to 1929 for projects such as the Marathon waterworks, which assured a regular supply of water for Athens for the first time, and land reclamation work in northern Greece.⁸

In more general terms, the United States retained its traditional distance from political developments in Europe, as it sought to avoid foreign entanglements. The acceptability and durability of this policy orientation for Americans continued in the 1930s, even as the European continent witnessed the establishment of dictatorships with aggressive, expansionist designs. If American leaders followed the menacing actions of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany with concern but at a distance, they viewed the Balkan states as a veritable backwater. One historian has written that in 1937: "There were no officials in the [Department of State's] Division of European Affairs who knew or cared enough about the Balkans to appreciate the nuances of shifting trends in the interrelationships among the countries of the region."⁹ The astute observations of able envoys such as Lincoln MacVeagh in Greece served at least to increase the political information available in Washington as conditions worsened in the late 1930s. A personal friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, MacVeagh wrote letters to him about diplomatic doings in his corner of Europe. For Roosevelt, "it was the mounting international tension that was truly noteworthy, and although not in the center of things, the Balkans were a good listening post, ablaze with rumors about real or imagined crises."¹⁰ It would not be long, however, before Balkan events steadily became more

significant even for American policy makers.

Shortly after Nazi Germany's seizure of Prague in mid-March 1939, Benito Mussolini on Good Friday, April 7, sent troops into Albania and annexed it to the Italian Empire. As had been the general pattern before with other acts of Axis aggression, the United States protested verbally but took no direct action. Two days after Hitler's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Nazi Germany. World War II had begun with the United States a concerned observer from across the Atlantic.

The fall of France and the Low Countries in the spring of 1940 left Britain alone in the war against the Axis. With prewar security agreements and guarantees of territorial integrity by France and Britain now relegated to the scrap heap, the individual Balkan states clung nervously to policies of neutrality. Steadfastly adhering to a policy of noninvolvement in the war, the Roosevelt administration nonetheless declared its willingness to help Britain and to supply aid to victims of aggression. Moreover, concurrent with increased British concerns in the Balkans came a rising American interest for a region that had been quite remote only a few months before.¹¹

Greece became the next victim of Axis aggression when Italy invaded from Albania on October 28, 1940. Outgunned and outmanned, the Greeks responded dramatically with battlefield victories that in less than four weeks pushed the Italians back into Albania. Desperate for supplies and cognizant of Britain's strained resources, the Greek government on November 6 made its first official request for American assistance. Capturing the sympathy and admiration of Americans, including their president, the Greeks never received the requisite amounts of aid despite professed intentions to do so on the part of Washington. Neutrality legislation, other legal and bureaucratic obstacles, and the priority placed on first satisfying British needs contributed to a confused sequence of events.¹²

The winter of 1941 witnessed considerable debate over the Roosevelt administration's sponsoring of the Lend-Lease Act to provide aid to nations resisting Axis aggression. Sensitivity to ominous conditions in the Balkans contributed to the bill's passage by Congress on March 11. Directly after his signing of the Lend-Lease Act on the same day, Roosevelt chose to express his concern for Balkan developments by declaring the defense of the Greek government vital to the defense of the United States. Greece along with Britain would be the first countries slated for Lend-Lease aid.

When Yugoslavia resisted pressures to join the Axis camp, Hitler revised his plans for consolidating Germany's position in the region prior to invading the Soviet Union. Axis forces crossed into Greece and Yugoslavia on April 6 from Albania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. In swift fashion they pushed into the interior of Yugoslavia, forcing the government to sign an unconditional surrender on April 17. Having heroically turned back the Italians earlier, the Greeks, supported by limited British forces, could not respond similarly against the overwhelming might of the German invaders. Greece, too, fell completely under Axis control by early June after a particularly bloody campaign on Crete. Now without a foothold on the European continent, Britain remained alone in its fight against the Axis. This situation changed quickly, however, when Hitler launched a massive invasion of the Soviet Union on June

22, 1941. Since America, still a non-belligerent, recognized the Greek government-in-exile, it ended all diplomatic representation in occupied Athens by mid-summer 1941. Americans would eventually come to serve Greece well in the area in which they had distinguished themselves earlier: humanitarian relief. The American Red Cross and Greek War Relief Association raised significant funds for assistance in the care of military and civilian war victims.

America's concern for Balkan developments would slacken in light of other priorities during the first stages of its own active involvement in the war after December 7, 1941. Inevitably, the significance of southeastern Europe would rise in direct relation to decisions affecting the course of military campaigns elsewhere in Europe.

Apart from the moral impetus inspired by America's entry into the war, little else was gained in the short run. Early 1942 found Axis forces well advanced into Soviet territory and no other allied troops, besides those of Josef Stalin, on the European continent. The establishment of an Anglo-American "second front" in western Europe emerged as perhaps the most critical issue in the diplomatic, military, and political considerations of the members of the Grand Alliance---the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. The Balkans played an adjunct role in planning, initially because the British and Americans perceived the strategic significance of the region in differing terms and later because the two powers disagreed over the desirability of applying a spheres of influence approach. In March 1942 Roosevelt and Churchill agreed that the Americans would relegate military responsibility to the British in the Balkans, as well as in the Middle East and the Far East. Europe and the Atlantic were to be under joint responsibility, while the Pacific was to be an American region.¹³

American and British strategists divided over two basic approaches toward defeating the enemy, between "the massive thrust at the enemy's heart, and successive stabs around the periphery to bleed the enemy to death, like jackals worrying a lion before springing at his throat."¹⁴ American officers sought the second front as soon as possible, but their British counterparts prevailed in arguments advocating the latter tactics. Thus, the first major Anglo-American campaign against the Axis began in French North Africa on November 8, 1942. Despite Churchill's August 1942 promise to Stalin that a cross-channel attack was being planned for the spring of 1943, the invasion would be delayed several times. Instead, Anglo-American forces landed in Sicily on July 10, 1943.

The objective was to secure Mediterranean lines of communication and to intensify pressures on the unpopular regime of Mussolini in Italy. It was also hoped that, with success in that area of the Mediterranean, the Turkish government would then follow and actively join the anti-Axis coalition. Victories did come quickly in Sicily, Mussolini fell from power, Anglo-American forces landed in mainland Italy in early September, and the Italian government surrendered. But before allied forces could be reinforced to consolidate these gains, Hitler rushed German forces southward to take control over most of Italy. Extra German divisions also moved into Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia to occupy areas previously under Italian command. Turkey, meanwhile, maintained its role as an "evasive neutral"---so termed by historian Frank Weber.

Churchill continued to press for a strong presence in the Mediterranean.

American planners, on the other hand, intent on advancing preparations for a cross-channel invasion, continued their policy of resisting Churchill's schemes. General George C. Marshall, American Chief of Staff, had for some time considered London's proposals as a deliberate plan "to secure British control in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East region, and he adamantly opposed using American military forces to advance the cause of British imperialism."¹⁵ In late August 1943 at the Quadrant Conference in Quebec Roosevelt refused to yield to Churchill's requests, and it was agreed that operations in the Balkan area would be "limited to supply of Balkan guerillas by air and sea transport, to minor Commando forces, and to the bombing of strategic objectives."¹⁶

Churchill did not back off completely, and he would continue to reintroduce the feasibility of increased Balkan operations. A perhaps exaggerated but nonetheless symbolic exchange between Churchill and General Marshall occurred when the prime minister in January 1944 urged an invasion of the German-occupied island of Rhodes off the Turkish coast. The American general responded sharply: "No American is going to land on that god-damn island."¹⁷

Such pronouncements, however, should not be overemphasized to the extent that they indicate an exclusive hands-off attitude by the United States in the Balkans. American policy and activities were conducted at various levels, indicating diversity for some critics, inconsistency for others. For example, one organization that sought to establish an American role in southeastern Europe was the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Formed in June 1942 under Brigadier General Bill Donovan, the OSS was to serve as America's intelligence and sabotage service. Shortly after in September 1942, the OSS and Special Operations Executive (SOE), its British counterpart, agreed that the latter would have the directing role in the Balkans.

It was not long, however, before Donovan viewed the Balkans as an appropriate zone of action for himself and his men. The complexities of the Balkan situation and British difficulties there did not discourage him. Donovan "believed that America in general, and O.S.S. in particular, could succeed in Balkan and Middle Eastern areas where the 'imperialistic' British were doomed to fail."¹⁸ Such a mission proved more easily contemplated than implemented.

Axis domination of southeastern Europe had placed only a temporary lid on prewar domestic rivalries. The relative strengths of political groups shifted during the occupation period with communist-led resistance organizations gaining prominence in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Albania.

Thus in Greece the National Liberation Front (*Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo---* EAM) and the National Popular Liberation Army (*Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos---* ELAS), its military arm, formed in the fall of 1941 as a communist-dominated coalition of Greek leftist and resistance groups. Its strength steadily increased at the expense of other, more politically moderate resistance organizations that had closer links with the royalist government-in-exile.

The British encountered problems in their general program of coordinating resistance activities, a policy made more difficult when communist-led organizations proved generally more active and effective in dealing with the occupiers than the more

moderate and conservative groups. London finally agreed to the dispatching of OSS missions to Yugoslavia, Greece, and Albania during the summer of 1943. Yet, despite Roosevelt's strong suggestion that Dovovan become more directly involved, Churchill responded in terms indicating that Britain had no intention of sharing influence with America in Greece and Yugoslavia.¹⁹

Perhaps unwittingly, Roosevelt involved himself directly in the controversy centering around the future of the monarchy in Greece. Widely unpopular in Greece because of his support for the prewar dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, King George II nonetheless insisted that he return with Greek troops upon his country's liberation. EAM, in turn, could credit much of its widespread support to a strong anti-monarchist position. In late November 1943 the British, concerned that they might not have adequate troops to enforce the monarchy's restoration, reversed their former position and urged George to postpone his immediate return and to consent to a regency until a plebiscite could be held. Shortly after the Teheran Conference, the American president arrived in Cairo in early December for continued talks with Churchill. During his stay he met with King George, whom he considered "nice but stupid." After listening to the grievances of "Georgie," who claimed he was being "railroaded" or "blackmailed" by the British, Roosevelt apparently told him not to succumb to the pressures from London. George in a meeting with Churchill then refused to yield to the prime minister's advice, largely on the strength of what the president had told him. Roosevelt left instructions that because he felt that the king was "having a pistol put to his head by the British," MacVeagh, America's ambassador, should not associate himself with any efforts to force the king to act against his will.²⁰

In light of Roosevelt's strongly expressed opinions, Churchill reluctantly decided to revert to the earlier position that supported the king's sentiments. Bearing in mind the sequence of events in subsequent months, Roosevelt doubtlessly had no idea of the impact of his decision to intervene in this Balkan tangle. There is no existing documentary evidence to indicate that the American president had given deep thought to the problematic conditions surrounding the monarchy or why he should oppose a democratically conducted plebiscite. He shallowly observed in a January 15, 1944 letter to MacVeagh that "a tiny spot in the Mediterranean, like Greece, has its reputation enhanced if it has a constitutional monarch . . ." ²¹ It has been remarked critically that Roosevelt's position might have been "the kind of reflex action exhibited by so many Americans when faced with British influence in smaller nations." ²²

Anglo-American differences over future policy became increasingly apparent during 1944. Roosevelt did not project a postwar role of heavy American involvement in Europe. In the extensive exchanges with Churchill over proposed occupation zones in Germany, Roosevelt in early February stated quite categorically: "I am absolutely unwilling to police France and possibly Italy and the Balkans as well." ²³ Later that month the president told the State Department: "I do not want the United States to have the post-war burden of reconstituting France, Italy and the Balkans. This is not our natural task at a distance of 3,500 miles or more. It is definitely a British task in which the British are far more vitally interested than we are." ²⁴ With this line of thinking, Washington was determining that the security of postwar Europe was to be left to the

Europeans. Ideally, American leaders sought a postwar world based on democracy, liberal capitalism, and the end of economic and political imperialism. London, of course, was sensitive to the latter objective that would challenge Britain's hold on its colonial empire.

The British began, also, to express growing concern in 1944 about the postwar distribution of political power in Europe. Whereas strategic considerations had predominated in his decision making for the eastern Mediterranean, Churchill now increasingly evaluated the political impact of policy and military campaigns.

With Stalin's army approaching the Romanian frontier in the early spring of 1944, London apprehensively viewed the likelihood of the Soviet Union filling the power vacuum created by the German military retreat from Eastern Europe. Britain could not allow its traditional interests in the Mediterranean to be threatened by expanding Soviet influence in the region. In early May 1944 Churchill minuted Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden about "the brute issues between us and the Soviet government which are developing in Italy, in Rumania, in Bulgaria, in Yugoslavia and above all in Greece. Are we going to acquiesce in the Communization of the Balkans and perhaps of Italy?" The prime minister added: "If our conclusion is that we resist Communist infusion and invasion, we should put it to them pretty plainly . . . evidently we are approaching a show-down with the Russians."²⁵

Eden responded by pursuing a political understanding with the Soviets on southeastern Europe. Moscow replied positively, adding that its agreement would be dependent on the prior consent of the United States. Churchill summed up the basic terms in his communication to Roosevelt on May 19, noting the Soviets "have today told us they accept the broad principle that they take the lead in the Rumanian business and give us the lead in Greece. I am quite content with this." On May 31 the prime minister reiterated his concerns about Soviet expansion into the Balkans and stated that Moscow accepted his proposal. He hoped that Roosevelt would give this plan his "blessing." Rather disingenuously, Churchill maintained that the British and Soviets did not wish to carve up the Balkans into spheres of influence and that these arrangements applied only to wartime conditions. He also added that this agreement "would be a useful device for preventing any divergence of policy between ourselves and them in the Balkans."²⁶ To Churchill's consternation, Washington expressed disapproval of the proposed arrangement as a step toward establishing regional spheres of influence, which, in principle, America could not support.

Churchill reacted quickly and the next day expressed his conviction that action would be paralyzed "if everybody is to consult everybody else about everything before it is taken. The events will always outstrip the changing situations in these Balkan regions. Somebody must have the power to plan and act."²⁷ The prime minister felt it most important that Stalin would allow him to take the lead in Greece, thereby permitting Britain to help Greek national forces to contain EAM after liberation. He concluded by requesting a trial of three months for this formula. Roosevelt now shifted his position and replied affirmatively, emphasizing however: "We must be careful to make it clear that we are not establishing any post war spheres of influence."²⁸ In his own mind Roosevelt apparently saw no contradiction between temporary backing for the British

proposal and his own opposition to postwar spheres of influence.²⁹

With the Soviet Army advancing steadily, first into eastern and then southeastern Europe, Churchill increasingly expressed concern about maintaining traditional British interests in the Mediterranean and specifically in Greece. Whereas Churchill sought to engineer policy systematically to protect regional political interests, America's actions did not demonstrate such concerns. Instead, Washington continued to have military considerations dominate policy decisions--even if by its wavering position the U.S. actually reinforced the spheres of influence approach of Britain and the Soviet Union.

In mid-August 1944 Churchill had expressed his concerns to Roosevelt about what the situation in Greece would be after German troops retreated. In order to thwart the possibility of an EAM takeover of power, the prime minister proposed sending 10,000 men "by the most expeditious means into the capital when the time is ripe." He asked for American air transport in order to facilitate this mission. Against the advice of the State Department, Roosevelt responded positively on August 26, stating that he had no objections to preparing "a sufficient British force to preserve order in Greece" and to the use of American transport airplanes.³⁰

Two days earlier, Roosevelt told Lincoln MacVeagh emphatically that the United States would not use any troops in the Balkans "for any purpose whatsoever." The ambassador concluded, "So far as the Balkans are concerned, he has told Mr. Churchill to go ahead and run the show." Rather gloomily, MacVeagh recorded in his diary after his meeting with the president: "The meaning of this and of the short time he was willing to give to me on this visit 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 the answer." Since Churchill was to have responsibility for the area, "the most we can expect is that he [i.e. Roosevelt] will allow us to make it clear that Churchill's doings are not our doings."³¹

During their mid-September meeting in Quebec, Roosevelt and Churchill spoke of a future tripartite meeting with Stalin. Since Roosevelt could not consider such a gathering until after the November election and since Churchill believed some issues too pressing, the prime minister determined to schedule a preliminary session with the Soviet leader in Moscow. Churchill cabled Stalin with this proposal on September 27. Two days later he wrote the president that the "two great objects" of their Moscow exchanges would be to assure Soviet entry into the war with Japan and "to effect a friendly settlement with Poland." He added: "There are other points too about Greece and Yugoslavia which we would also discuss." It was agreed that America's ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman, would be available as an observer for advice and consultation. Roosevelt informed Churchill, however, that Harriman would not be in a position to commit the United States, emphasizing: "I could not permit anyone to commit me in advance."³²

Ultimately, Roosevelt's policy seemed to be guided by sentiments expressed in a message to Ambassador Harriman: ". . . my active interest at the present time in the Balkan area is that such steps as are practicable should be taken to insure against the Balkans getting us into a future international war."³³ Such a stance, deliberately or not, provided leeway for spheres of influence arrangements.

And such was the direction taken by Churchill during his Moscow conversations with Stalin. Other issues, including Poland, Germany, and the war with Japan, came up in their meetings which lasted from October 9 to 17, but the distribution of great power influence in southeastern Europe dominated proceedings. The implications and interpretations of the "percentages agreement," a "naughty document" according to one Foreign Office account, have intrigued analysts from the time its details first became known.

With the Red Army well-positioned in Romania and Bulgaria for campaigns southward and westward and with limited British forces only recently landed in Greece, the prime minister sought an agreement with Stalin to secure British interests and avert future disputes. Churchill stressed London's particular preoccupation with Greece and that Britain "must be the leading Mediterranean Power and he hoped that Marshal Stalin would let him have the first say about Greece in the same way as Marshal Stalin about Roumania." Stalin acknowledged these British interests in Greece and the Mediterranean. Churchill commented that "it was better to express these things in diplomatic terms and not to use the phrase 'dividing into spheres,' because the Americans might be shocked. But as long as he and Marshal understood each other he could explain matters to the President."³⁴

Having quickly established the broader guidelines of their understanding, Churchill and Stalin delegated their foreign ministers, Anthony Eden and Vyacheslav Molotov, to work out relative percentages. After considerable haggling and with some revision of Churchill's original proposals, it was agreed that Britain would have 90 percent influence in Greece with 10 percent influence for the Soviet Union. The percentages in reverse would hold for Romania. Yugoslavia would see a 50/50 distribution while Bulgaria and Hungary would have 80 percent influence for the Soviets and 20 percent for the British.³⁵

Overall, British efforts at Moscow produced a seemingly workable, albeit controversial, guide for distributing Allied influence in the Balkans during the remainder of the war yet with potentially longer range implications. Churchill and Eden were well aware of the sensitive nature of the decisions for America's declared policy positions. Consequently, it has been stated that: "In Moscow the two men behaved slightly like schoolboys playing truant."³⁶

After major policy directions were established with Stalin, Churchill on October 11 informed Roosevelt of the "extraordinary atmosphere of goodwill here" and added: "You may be sure we shall handle everything so as not to commit you." At the close of the conference Churchill summarized its accomplishments, downplaying Balkan issues by placing them sixth among seven subjects and concluding: "Arrangements made about the Balkans are, I am sure, the best that are possible. Coupled with our successful military action recently we should now be able to save Greece . . ."³⁷

Subsequent US policy positions indicated a studied detachment from any commitment to the percentages agreement of the two allied leaders. Although silently recognizing the short-term reality of power distribution, planners wished neither to undercut permanently the long-term idealistic objectives of U.S. policy nor to constrain freedom of maneuver.

With the withdrawal of the German occupation forces during October, ELAS controlled most of the Greek countryside. British and Greek government forces, the latter purged of anti-monarchists, moved into Athens but had far fewer troops at their disposal. EAM nonetheless had agreed to demobilization, perhaps under persuasive guidance from Moscow. But negotiations over the demobilization's details between Prime Minister George Papandreou and the EAM ministers in the post-liberation government broke down by late November. The communist leadership then announced that ELAS would not demobilize as scheduled on December 10, and the government's six left-wing ministers resigned on December 1. The British in forceful language expressed their determination to back the Papandreou government in its policies. With tensions mounting rapidly, the inevitable confrontation occurred during a demonstration on December 3 in central Athens when panic-stricken security forces fired on EAM demonstrators.

Within several days full-scale civil war developed. Evidence seems to indicate that neither side had planned for such an outcome, but Churchill appeared ready to confront it. On November 7 the prime minister had minuted to his foreign secretary: "In my opinion, having paid the price we have to Russia for freedom of action in Greece, we should not hesitate to use British troops to support the Royal Hellenic Government. . . ." After the outbreak of fighting, Churchill on December 5, telegraphed General Ronald Scobie, the head of British forces in Greece, directing him: "Do not . . . hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress. . . . We have to hold and dominate Athens."³⁸ Bitter fighting extended into the New Year.

The equivocal nature of Washington's policy in Greece aggravated Anglo-American relations. One year earlier in Cairo, Roosevelt had backed King George's return, blocking Churchill's proposal for a regency and plebiscite as an important preliminary step towards the restoration of constitutional conditions. In the belief that the monarch would provide a sturdy guarantee against the spread of communism, the prime minister then recommitted British policy to the return of George despite the many indicators of the monarch's widespread unpopularity. The resulting obdurate positions of Churchill and George heightened tensions in the Greek political world during the summer and fall of 1944. In the meantime, Roosevelt, after having interceded at a critical juncture on this major question, quietly backed off from his earlier support of George's return. Then, at the time of the outbreak of fighting in December and the forceful British response in Athens, Washington reacted critically, partially in response to American public opinion. A State Department statement on December 5 disapproved of British interventionist tactics in Italy and Greece and concluded: "We expect the Italians to work out their problems of government along democratic lines without influence from outside. This policy would apply to an even more pronounced degree with regard to governments of the United Nations [Allies] in their liberated territories."³⁹ This latter reference appeared to be directed at the situation in Greece.

Churchill replied quickly and indignantly, emphasizing: "I do not remember anything that the State Department has ever said about Russia or about any other allied state comparable to this document . . ."⁴⁰ Outwardly, Washington's policy appeared to straddle neutral ground, while the American press regularly published negative

judgments of British actions. Churchill later wrote: "Stalin however adhered strictly and faithfully to our agreement of October, and during all the long weeks of fighting the Communists in the streets of Athens not one word of reproach came from *Pravda* or *Izvestia*."⁴¹ The prime minister reminded Roosevelt that in late August he had approved the transfer of British troops to Greece for preventing a communist-inspired takeover and that Britain now operated alone under a barrage of criticism from America. The president responded sympathetically on December 13 but with the clarification: "As anxious as I am to be of the greatest help to you in this trying situation, 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." He then recommended the very solution that he had dismissed one year earlier, the establishment of a regency in place of George II.⁴²

London rushed detachments from the Italian front to Athens in order to reinforce its beleaguered troops who, with the limited Greek government forces, sought to forestall a takeover of the capital by ELAS. Churchill and Eden flew to Athens on Christmas eve in an attempt to reconcile warring factions. Failing in this effort, the prime minister modified his earlier strident stand on the king's return, despite George's opposition, and supported the establishment of a regency under Damaskinos, the Archbishop of Athens, and a plebiscite on the constitutional question of monarchy or republic. Roosevelt responded to the altered position with encouraging words for the prime minister: "I am ready to be of all assistance I can in this difficult situation."⁴³ The tide of battle had started to turn in favor of the anti-ELAS forces, and on December 30 Archbishop Damaskinos became regent.

Britain's determined efforts to squash the armed challenge of EAM/ELAS against the Greek government's authority and the Soviet Union's general hands-off policy saw the tide of battle shifting. A formal end to the fighting came with the signing of a political settlement at Varkiza outside of Athens on February 12, 1945. ELAS agreed to demobilize and disarm, and the Greek government pledged an amnesty for political crimes during the conflict, a distinction that would later create serious problems. It also promised to guarantee democratic freedoms and to conduct a plebiscite on the monarchy before national elections. Relative peace appeared to have come for Greece.

During the winter of 1945 the Allies wrestled with the problems of ending the war and securing the victory in the postwar period. Alliance partners differed on details, methods, and principles, and despite much talk about a new-style postwar order, old formulas and patterns persisted in decision making. This became rather evident during the strained proceedings of the Yalta Conference from February 4 to 11. Although Greece was a relative sideshow subject at Yalta, John Iatrides has pointed out that America's "frustration with Britain's highhanded policy in Greece" manifested itself indirectly at Yalta. "The Declaration on Liberated Europe approved at Yalta was an American document drafted in large measure with Greece in mind and designed to avert one-sided foreign interventions in the internal affairs of countries recently freed from foreign occupation."⁴⁴

The war in Europe came to a formal end in May 1945 with former allied unity fraying, with many volatile issues still unresolved, and with the death of Franklin D.

Roosevelt in the preceding month adding to the atmosphere of uncertainty. Yet even as Harry S Truman assumed the presidency, few could have foreseen the altered world role waiting in the wings for the United States---and for Greece's position in it.

Greece and the Balkans had traditionally been an area of distant interest for the United States, and the Roosevelt administration's statements indicated that it would continue to be so in the postwar era. Moreover, American insistence on a new postwar order based on the idealistic principles of the Atlantic Charter and on the functioning of a new international organization, the United Nations, to mediate disputes provided moral justification for noninvolvement in this and other regions. The British and Soviets, granting rhetorical lip service to their American ally, resorted to more traditional procedures for resolving conflicts of interest within the alliance. One can argue that Roosevelt's policy appears to indicate neither naïveté nor shallowness, but rather a desire to maintain, as much as possible, America's independence of action in policy making. That America sponsored more idealistic policies did not mean that it was ignorant of or totally averse to shadier methods in time of need. Ultimately, Roosevelt sought to draw others up to the moral high ground while not allowing America to drift too far downward in response to reverse pressures. But as the consummate politician, Roosevelt often confused advisers and allies with his methods and policies, which seemed to lack consistency--and not just in the Balkan area. And when it came to Greece, his involvement at times had added to the problems rather than to a solution.

Although the Varkiza Armistice had seemingly ended the bloodshed, Greece remained a politically split country, as it had been at the close of World War I. And just as political divisions contributed to national disaster then, so they would in the coming months for Greece. Because of the larger and complex chessboard of emerging superpower rivalries, the United States could not remain aloof. Civil war erupted again in Greece in 1946. Great Britain displayed its interest in maintaining its important presence in Greek affairs but had to acknowledge that it did not have the capabilities. The United States had the capabilities but initially not the interest--and not just in relation to Greece. By 1947, however, the US found itself becoming a practitioner of hard power, assuming many of the practices and methods it had disdained and criticized Great Britain for just months before. The Cold War had commenced and Greece was central in its development.

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 3. Quoted in Sydney Nettleton Fisher, "Two Centuries of American Interest in Turkey," *A Festschrift for Frederick B. Artz*, ed. David H. Pinkney and Theodore Ropp (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1964), 117.
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