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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP, BRINKMANSHIP, AND
DETERRENCE FAILURE

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Abstract

This article argues against two firmly-established ideas about the 1944 communist insurgency that led to the outbreak of civil war in postliberation Greece: (a) blame attribution to predominantly one actor, who, depending on each author's ideological perspective, is either the Greek Communists or the British, and (b) outcome inevitability. Instead, the present analysis brings to the fore a set of no less than five distinct actors including, besides the original two, Prime Minister George Papandreou; Greece's traditional political class; and the Greek monarch. Based primarily on the close reading of original documents, such as the personal accounts left behind by the protagonists of the civil war drama, and using causal inferences derived from counterfactual logic, this analysis shows that the Greek civil war would have been an inevitable outcome only if there were on the scene just two actors, the British and the Communists, directly confronting each other. Since however that was not the case, it is shown that Papandreou could have prevented civil war had he succeeded in both forging strategic alliances with the traditional political elites and embracing republicanism. His failure to implement either goal offers a novel interpretation of the Greek civil war, which also emphasizes the need for bringing leadership back into the study of civil war and other contentious politics phenomena. This is expected to foster our thinking about the dynamics leading to civil war outbreaks at the crucial meso-level, while also alerting us to the fact that civil wars are rarely inevitable and that they can be prevented by strategic leadership action.

Keywords

Civil war prevention; Greece; counterfactual method; political leadership; George Papandreou; brinkmanship

I. Introduction

In early December 1944, shortly after liberation from the Axis, civil war broke out in Greece. In previous days, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) had withdrawn the leftist ministers from the British-backed national-unity government of George Papandreou, and called for a mass protest demonstration on 3 December in Athens. During that event, shots fired by the police on demonstrators left several people dead and many more injured. That incident signaled the official beginning of the first phase of civil strife in postliberation Greece, which lasted thirty-seven days and was characterized by atrocious violence and full-scale fighting between the nationalist camp, aided militarily by the British, and the communist-led forces. It also was the prelude to an even bloodier phase of civil war, which was to begin in 1946 and end only in the fall of 1949 with the complete military defeat of the communist forces by the Greek national army.

The literature on the Greek civil war is already vast and, largely thanks to the path-breaking study of Stathis Kalyvas (2006), which is based on regional evidence from that civil war, still growing. Yet, the major point of contention among scholars is still open: Which were the reasons that caused the communist insurgency in December 1944? Most, if not all, interpretations focus on either the British, allegedly fomenting civil war in order to keep Greece under their sphere of influence and reinstitute the monarchy (e.g., Eudes 1972; Svoronos 1981; Hondros 1983; Richter 1986; Vlavianos 1992; Sfikas 1994) or the intransigence of the Greek communist leadership, which is further attributed to a variety of reasons (e.g., Kousoulas 1965; Farakos 1996; Iliou 1996, 2004). Such interpretations suffer from two grave flaws: first, methodological bias, since, depending on each author's ideological perspective, all blame is attributed wholesale to either the British or the communists while other important actors are neglected, and, second, an almost “inbuilt teleological impulse” (Kershaw 2007: 6) prompting the belief that the Greek civil war was in fact inevitable. The present article is revisionist in both respects in that it seeks to bring the multiplicity of actors involved back into analysis, thus proposing a novel interpretation in which the outbreak of the Greek civil war was anything but unavoidable.

The article focuses on the short but critical period of Papandreou's premiership (April-December 1944) – regarded by many as the “holy grail” of Greek historiography – and asks three interrelated questions. Which were the political causes of civil war in Greece? Was it really inevitable? And, if not, what could have been done to prevent it? Following a series of “hidden” assumptions about the relationship of ... threat and response, and the ability of leaders to influence the calculations and behavior of their would-be adversaries” (Lebow 1985: viii), my argument will be that the Greek civil war would have been an inevitable outcome *only* if there were on the scene just two actors, the British and the Communists, directly facing each other. And, moreover, that the presence of Papandreou as a third major actor, situated right between the two irreconcilable foes, could, theoretically as well as practically, have prevented civil war.¹ Papandreou, in short, failed to evaluate, and pursue, available alternatives that could have prevented civil war. Such an argument, to be sure, necessitates “counterfactual conditionals,” that is, some causal factor, Papandreou's alternative strategy, which did not obtain in the real world.

¹ George Papandreou, and his role in the course of developments leading to civil war, have been remarkably side-stepped, and even obscured, by both historians and political scientists sympathetic to either the Left (typically viewing Papandreou as a “puppet” of the British) or the Right (mostly for their eagerness to put all blame on the Communists).

In view of the explicitly counterfactual nature of my argument, a methodological caveat is in order. Causal inferences based on counterfactual logic can only be credible to the extent that their central argument is “cotenable” to reality (Goodman 1947), which is to say when “the counterfactual antecedent, when joined with appropriate theories and facts, implie[s] the consequent” (Fearon 1991: 193). Methodologically, therefore, cotenability in our case requires (a) that we carefully examine the historical evidence in order to show that all constituent elements for Papandreou's supposedly superior alternative strategy were *practically* available at the time and (b) that, once such a strategy was in place, there existed a *theoretical* possibility for civil war deterrence. As subsequent analysis will show, both requirements are fully met. The answers provided by this analysis are important for at least three reasons: first, they add a wholly different perspective in a long-standing debate about the causes of the Greek civil war; second, they offer many valuable lessons of both comparative and theoretical value about civil war containment; and, third, they may serve as a reminder of the need to bring political leadership back into the analysis of civil wars and other contentious politics phenomena.

The study of the outbreak of civil war in postliberation Greece must account synthetically for all five actors involved in it, of which three (the British, the Communists, and Papandreou) were the protagonists and two (the traditional Greek political class and the Greek monarch) played supportive, albeit critical, roles. Each of them decided on the basis of their own interests, but also on the basis of how they perceived the other actors' interests. Accordingly, the rest of this article is divided into seven sections. Section II offers a concise overview of the actors involved and surrounding historical conditions that paved the way to civil war; Sections III through V explain each of the protagonists' preferences, tactics, and actual choices; Section VI is an analysis of the strategies being available to Papandreou in order to deter civil war; Section VII is about explanations and answering the questions posed in this introduction; Section VIII contains conclusions.

II. Historical background: Paving the way to civil war, 1941-1944

Shortly after Greece's occupation by the Axis forces in April 1941, which was followed by the evacuation of the Greek government and the remnants of its army from it, there emerged in the country a strong resistance movement that took various forms ranging from simple acts of defiance to intelligence-gathering and sabotage. The Communists, more particularly, exploiting the bankruptcy of the mainstream interwar political parties, set up the National Liberation Front (EAM), which was soon to grow into a nationwide mass movement with superb organizational capacity and great potential for ideological indoctrination and propaganda. Other resistance groups also sprang up in many parts of the country, as were the National Republican Greek League (EDES) or the National and Social Liberation (EKKA).

Of all resistance organizations, communist-led EAM turned out to be the most important. By the end of 1943, it had established its authority in the larger part of the mostly mountainous country, where it applied a novel system of local self-government and controlled most social and economic activity. The KKE was moreover able to create its own fighting force, the National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS), which became particularly formidable after the collapse of Italy in September 1943 and the capture of Italian ammunition by its fighters. By the autumn of that year, on account of military preponderance, EAM/ELAS decided to eliminate all rival guerilla groups and monopolize the Greek resistance movement. It then undertook a series of systematic, large-scale attacks upon EDES, which, having suffered considerable losses, retreated to a small area of Epirus; EKKA was completely wiped out.

When hostilities between the rival resistance groups ceased in February 1944 under British pressure, EAM/ELAS had remained the only organization that was strong enough and confident to claim power when liberation was to come.

To that purpose, the communist leadership established in March 1944 the so-called Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA), which declared political control over “Free Greece,” formed its own cabinet, held elections, and, in May, convened a “national assembly.” The emergence of a distinct center of authority from the exiled Greek government that had been established in Cairo helped spark among the (mostly republican) Greek armed forces stationed in the Middle East a mutiny, which eventually was to force Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos to resign. As the crisis was taking dimensions, the government, under heavy British influence, sent for George Papandreou, a relatively young republican and anti-communist politician, who promptly came from Athens to Cairo and took office on April 26.

Papandreou was chosen because no other politician of some credibility, skills, and energy was available at the time. He moreover seemed to be in a position to talk sensibly, and perhaps persuasively, to the leaders of EAM. As summarized by Churchill in a report he sent to Roosevelt amidst the Greek army mutiny crisis: “The politicians in Cairo realised that the matter ... [was] to find some candidate for the Premiership sufficiently notorious for his Left Wing views to be acceptable to the mutinous elements in the forces” (Churchill 1951: 548). Indeed, upon his arrival, Papandreou brought a “breath of fresh air in the over-charged atmosphere of Greek Cairo” (Leeper 1950: 47) and there was optimism again for uniting all political forces in support of a coalition government. “I liked [Papandreou] a lot,” wrote U.S. ambassador MacVeagh (1980: 503) after they first met in Cairo, “and agree with [Britain’s ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile] Leeper that he is several cuts above the petty figures we have had here ... Something might be done with him to get the Greeks together.”

Soon after taking the oath of office in late April, Papandreou, coached by the British, decided to convene a conference aimed to achieve national political unity. Thereupon, during 17-20 May, twenty-eight delegates of Greek political parties and resistance organizations, representing among them the whole gamut of political views about Greece’s future, assembled at a hotel located outside Beirut, Lebanon, for a conference intended to produce a coalition government. During the conference workings, while the leftist representatives “appeared to be subdued and off balance” (Iatrides 1972: 64; also Kanellopoulos 2003: 569), Papandreou did not shy away from castigating EAM for having established a “reign of terror” in Greece, at the same time making a strong pitch for political cooperation and national unity (Papandreou 1948). At the end, although EAM’s representatives signed all general terms and accepted to participate in the new government, Lebanon failed to settle things down, to provide solutions, to forge credible alliances, to cultivate trust and a sense of cooperation; instead, it became a source of misgivings, suspicion, and mutual distrust.

Papandreou’s bout in government was to be short and have a sad end. His premiership, just like a drama in four acts, was marked by major historical events located in different places, each of them corresponding to specific sets of risks but also opportunities. Beirut, Lebanon, was only the first of those acts to be followed in thick succession by another three: Cairo, Egypt, where Papandreou’s first government was formed, albeit with considerable difficulty; Caserta, Italy, where a military agreement was signed between the British, Papandreou’s government, and the major resistance organizations; and Athens, Greece, where, within only a few weeks, the postliberation developments unfolded into civil war. These events will be recounted in Sections III through V, which examine the strategic dilemmas faced by the chief actors involved, and the choices thereby made before the outbreak of civil war.

III. British vs. EAM/ELAS: Determination

In Greece, as in Yugoslavia, the major aim of the British during the war had been to create a strong and effective resistance movement against the Axis Powers (Auty and Clogg 1975; Papastratis 1984). As the war seemed nearing its end, however, in contrast to what happened in Yugoslavia, the British appeared in Greece determined to safeguard parliamentary democracy and avert the danger of communism. Wartime British policy towards Greece, and more particularly vis-à-vis EAM/ELAS, can therefore be distinguished into two phases according to the different logics that successively motivated it – one purely military and another predominantly political.

The first phase lasted from 1941 to the summer of 1943 and was motivated by Churchill's declared intention to "set Europe ablaze" for defeating Nazism. Resistance to the Axis forces, no matter where it came from, was an asset to the British war effort and Greece could be no exception to that. Accordingly, as early as the autumn of 1942 the British had established contact with the major Greek resistance organizations, which was maintained well into the following year. By the summer of 1943, however, and especially after the decision was taken for an Allied landing in Sicily rather than in the Balkans, Greece's strategic importance for the British became diminished while its internal squabbles for power were brought to the fore. During the autumn, as ELAS had already undertaken to eliminate all rival resistance organizations, the Foreign Office (FO) policy underwent a major reversal (Woodhouse 1975: 117) which put into question the value of communist-led resistance and sought a political solution for keeping postliberation Greece secure into the Western world.

Thus, during the second phase of British policy towards Greece, spanning the period from autumn 1943 to early post-liberation, the chief British preoccupation was to avert the communist danger in Greece and preserve Britain's interests in the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the Middle East. The British plan for Greece was based on the realization that some form of military intervention in Greek internal affairs at liberation time was necessary lest the country not turn communist. As early as September 1943, Churchill had sent a minute to the British Chiefs of Staff stating the following:

Should the Germans evacuate Greece, we must certainly be able to send five thousand troops with armoured cars and Bren gun carriers into Athens [whose duty] would be to give support at the centre to the restored lawful Greek government. ... The troops need not be organized to content with more than rioting in the capital or incursion into the capital from the countryside" (Churchill 1951: 538).

Subsequent developments in Greece (as were the military successes of ELAS over the non-communist guerilla organizations; the formation of the PEEA in the Greek mountains; and the mutinies among the Greek armed forces in the Middle East provoked by communist sympathizers) further alarmed the British who now appeared more anxious not to lose control of the situation. As seen by Leeper in early 1944, "Greece is now at the crossroads. This movement [EAM] has ceased to be an internal affair. The question is whether Greece will move into the Russian orbit and lose her independence, or remain a Mediterranean country under British influence" (in McVeagh 1980: 504). At the same time, as the FO was active in devising a plan of coming to an agreement with Moscow over the Balkan territories, and especially Greece, Churchill, fully aware that things were approaching "a showdown with the Russians" and that the British involvement in Greek internal politics was "a dangerous episode, which ... might have been detrimental to our affairs" (Churchill 1951: 552), had become determined to keep Greece under British influence.

So, in mid-May, while in Cairo Papandreou was struggling to form a government, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was suggesting to Moscow the possibility of making Rumania their own concern while leaving Greece to the British. At the same time, Churchill stepped up his support for Papandreou's fledgling government, which, as will shortly be shown, was already facing enormous difficulties. In a telegraph he sent to Eden on 6 August 1944, Churchill (1953: 109; my emphasis) is quite revealing about the British position vis-à-vis both Papandreou and the future of Greece:

Surely we should tell M. Papandreou he should continue as Prime Minister and defy them all. ... We cannot take a man up as we have done Papandreou and let him be thrown to the wolves at the first snarlings of the miserable Greek [Communist] banditti. ... *The case seems to me to have reached the following point: either we support Papandreou, if necessary with force as we have agreed, or we disinterest ourselves utterly in Greece.*"

But Churchill was anything but determined to disentangle from Greece and, on the same day, he warned the British Chiefs of Staff as follows:

It may be that within a month or so we shall have to put 10,000 or 12,000 men into Athens, with a few tanks, guns, and armoured cars. ... If you have a better plan let me know it (ibid.).

As there obviously was no better plan, the British were now bound for military action against their former allies in postliberation Greece with all the intended and unintended consequences such a move was to have. Churchill's plan, code-named *Manna*, provided that the British forces would prevent EAM from seizing power after liberation. Firmly believing that "there should be no political vacuum in Greece," he minuted the FO on 29 August: "It is most desirable to strike out of the blue without any preliminary crisis. It is the best way to forestall the E.A.M." (ibid.: 284).

Two important events came to reinforce Churchill's plan, one related to Greek domestic affairs, the other to international developments. The first event was the signing among the British, the Greek government-in-exile, and the leaders of the major guerilla organizations in late September 1944 of the Caserta Agreement, which placed all armed Greek forces under the authority of the national government which, in turn, licensed a British officer, Lieutenant General Ronald Scobie, to assume command of the Greek resistance forces. Under such terms, which had no parallel in the postwar arrangements of any other country, the British government was fully admitted into postliberation domestic Greek affairs. The second event that greatly facilitated the British plans was the so-called Percentages Agreement in early October between Moscow and London, which divided the Eastern Europe and the Balkans into "spheres of influence" leaving Greece securely into the British sphere. For Churchill, fearing no Soviet obstruction in Greece anymore, "[t]he testing time for our arrangements had now come. [...] We were pledged to support Papandreou's Provisional Administration, in which E.A.M were fully represented. All parties were bound by the Caserta Agreement, and we wished to handle over authority to a stable Greek Government without loss of time" (Churchill 1953: 285-6).

But what if the communist leaders were not willing to abide by the British plan? In that case, Churchill had no illusions and, on 7 November, he minuted to Eden:

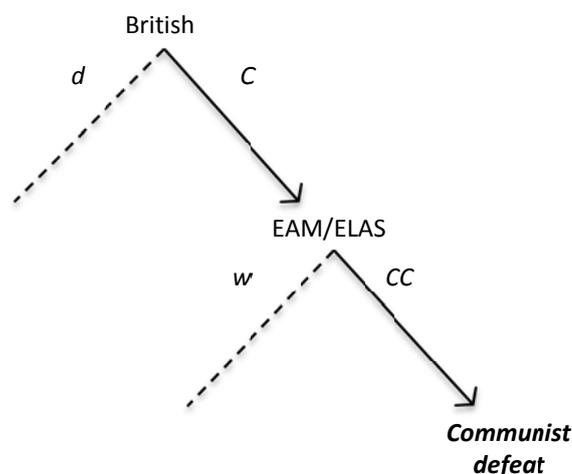
In my opinion, having paid the price we have to Russia for freedom of action in Greece, we should not hesitate to use British troops to support the Royal Hellenic Government under M. Papandreou. ... *I fully expect a clash with E.A.M., and we must not shrink from it, provided the ground is well chosen*" (ibid.: 286-7; emphasis added).

Accordingly, Churchill reinforced the British troops in Athens and directed General Scobie to order ELAS units out of it. Pressure began to mount for the demobilization of the guerillas

and the establishment of a national army and police force under the control of Papandreou's government.

As it becomes obvious from the foregoing analysis, had the main players in postliberation Greece been only the British and EAM/ELAS (like in a situation where a colonial power is set against an insurgent nationalist army), the matter would be quite straightforward: each player would have to choose between two available options depending on the respective possibilities of eventual victory. As the British would certainly have opted for confrontation (C) over disentanglement from Greece (*d*), EAM/ELAS's options were either confrontation with the British (CC) or unconditional withdrawal (*w*).

Figure 1. The entanglement between the British and EAM/ELAS



In such zero-sum situations the stronger party moves first, and wins (Schelling 1960: 26). Since the British were better armed and organized, but also fully committed to their policy of keeping Greece outside the Soviet Union's postwar sphere of influence, there was no room for negotiation and bargaining between the parties. By moving first, therefore, and declaring their commitment to a strategy of confrontation (C), the British, thanks to their determination, superior military strength, and other resources, should be able to secure the Communists' withdrawal (outcome *d*); had the Communists, by miscalculation, opted for open confrontation (strategy CC), armed conflict was to ensue that, almost certainly, would cause their military defeat. And yet, in December 1944 the KKE leadership decided on a strategy of confrontation that led Greek communism to both military and political defeat. Could that fateful decision have been averted? And how? Before trying to answer these questions, let us previously focus on the dilemmas faced within the communist camp.

IV. EAM/ELAS vs. Papandreou's government: Irresolution

If the chief trait of British tactics concerning postwar Greece was their determination not to let this country fall prey to the Communists, EAM's tactics were above all characterized by irresolution. Around liberation time, whether by ideological indoctrination or the violent intimidation of its opponents (Kalyvas 2000), EAM presented as a massive movement throughout Greece while ELAS was a force to be reckoned as it controlled at least 50,000

armed men and women organized into divisions (Farakos 2000 vol. II: 64; Iatrides 1972: 24).² This presented the Communist leadership with an enormous dilemma: Should it attempt a military seizure of power at the cost of risking British military engagement, or should it pursue legal forms of political struggle risking a costly defeat at the polls? Permanently irresolute about the course of action to follow, the Communists were induced to opposite directions. Preparing during wartime for an armed seizure of power, their leaders seemed to opt after the war was over for non-violent action, and for some time pursued that option, before they eventually took the fatal choice in December 1944 for military confrontation.

For a mass movement like EAM, which was controlled by a Stalinist leadership, the armed seizure of power when time became opportune was only normal. As it emerges from a special report prepared by KKE's chief military adviser Theodoros Macrides (discussed in length in Farakos 2000 vol. II), the Communist leadership's had been planning to seize power by force date from as early as 1942. Fresh plans for capturing Athens were drafted, and approved, in April 1943 and, once again, in November of the same year (Farakos 2000 vol. II: 147; Iatrides 2005: 6). By that time, acting Secretary General of the KKE Giorgos Siantos had reached the following conclusion: "Partisan warfare is timely, indispensable and safe *only as long as it is ours*; otherwise, we have no use of it" (cited in Farakos 1996: 85; emphasis added). A yet another plan seems to have been prepared in August 1944, which, according to the recollections of KKE leader Yiannis Ioannides, had been simple and following a typical communist revolutionary logic:

[W]e shall capture five thousand to six thousand individuals in Athens and Piraeus and an equal number in Thessaloniki and in a few other major cities. We will seize them suddenly, by quick action, because we will know where they live. We will take them and neutralize them ... because we have launched a revolution, and the revolution does not know any other way. Anything else is absurdities. When you are fighting a civil war you do not indulge in sentimentalities ... You wipe out the enemy by whatever means (quoted in Iatrides 2005: 6)

Such plans were anything but abandoned after liberation, while at the same time EAM's ministers were seeking a political compromise with Papandreou. For instance, after a meeting they held on 17 November 1944, the most important ELAS commanders put pressure on the KKE leadership for not accepting the proposed demobilization of the communist army but pursue instead a military rather than a political course of action (Gasparinatos 1998 vol. I: 150-51). Still, it is rather hasty to accept that the KKE represented a monolithically "revolutionary party determined to seize power at the first opportunity" by armed force for at least two reasons. First, the Greek communist leaders had no assurances of Soviet assistance had they decided an insurgency against the government and, second, they never outright rejected the political solution but, however reluctantly, tried in fact to achieve it. These are points worthy of a closer look.

By the summer of 1943 several communist leaders had "concluded that because of British intervention they could not hope to achieve their goals through the political process" and that "victory could be assured only by military force, for which significant assistance from abroad would be necessary" (Iatrides 2005: 9, 10). Yet, no such assistance was forthcoming. An EAM delegation that flew to Cairo in August 1943 had been denied contact with any officials in the Soviet embassy while in March 1944, during the Greek army mutinies in the Middle East, Moscow ignored all appeals of the Greek communist leadership for support. In July

² Other sources raise the number to 76,350 armed fighters supported by another 43,000 non-armed reservist force (in Farakos 2000 vol. I: 218). Estimations of EAM's membership by the time of liberation vary between one million (Baerentzen 1984) and two million members (McNeill 1947: 132), out of a population of over seven million.

1944, a Soviet military mission under Lieutenant-Colonel Grigorii Popov arrived at the ELAS headquarters but, instead of encouragement for a clash with the British, they advised the Greek communists to join Papandreou's government (Ioannides 1977: 248-59). In September, shortly before Greece's liberation, the KKE once again appealed for assistance to Bulgaria's communist leader Georgi Dimitrov, then serving as Stalin's adviser on the Balkans, but to no avail (Banac 2003: 327). In October, Stalin and Churchill signed the Percentages Agreement in Kremlin, which apparently was kept secret from the KKE leadership (Stavrakis 1989). With Greece now placed so firmly within Britain's sphere of influence, the Greek communists had to wait for no aid from Moscow.

Lack of Soviet support sufficiently explains why not everyone in the EAM leadership was in favor of attempting an armed seizure of power in postliberation Greece. Although the threat of using arms could certainly remain for bargaining purposes, most communist leaders, however grudgingly (cf. Bartziotas 1979; Hatzis 1983 vol. III: 450), were rather keen to pursue a political solution. This reflects on EAM's co-signing the consequential agreements of Lebanon and Caserta, and thereafter restraining from an armed seizure of power after the departure of the Germans from Athens; the eventual participation of EAMite leaders in Papandreou's government; and the initially cooperative attitude they displayed with regard to the issue of ELAS's demobilization. More analytically:

Despite dissenting voices from leading party cadres, the agreements of Lebanon and Caserta were to a large extent respected in postliberation Greece by the communist leadership – a fact that has made many historians talk about EAM's "full" and "absolute" loyalty to Papandreou's government (Gasparinatos 1998 vol. I: 65, 76). Although such a claim is rather excessive given EAM's tactics of blackmailing the government (see next paragraph), it is nonetheless true that the Communists *did not* try to exploit their best opportunity for seizing power, which appeared during the few days in mid-October 1944 when the Germans were evacuating Greece and the British presence in Athens was rather scant. At that crucial moment during which, "save for a patch of land in the center of Athens, another stretch along the Bay of Phaleron, and two small zones in Salonika and Patras" (McNeill 1947: 177), Greece was under its control, EAM "kept order" (Kousoulas 1965: 196) and the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the KKE called the Athenians to remain "at the side of the National Government and our Great Allies" until the final liberation of the country. It was the best moment for a communist takeover; but the communist leadership simply let it go.

It is true, on the other hand, that, far from proving a loyal government partner, EAM had tried to blackmail Papandreou in order to force him into major policy concessions, particularly his pledge that the monarchy would not be restored prior to plebiscite. Examples of such tactics abound. As early as 24 May, while the majority of the new cabinet members had entered the government, the appointees representing EAM postponed their entry until there was a "clear solution on the constitutional question," at the same time demanding more portfolios in the new government. On 3 July, EAM's leadership sent Papandreou a telegram accusing him of having violated the Lebanon agreement. In the following day, EAM's spokesmen in the Middle East presented the prime minister with a set of demands titled "Our final terms of participation" in the new government. These terms included the public denouncement of collaborators with Germans in Greece and the organization of a plebiscite after liberation to settle the monarchy issue, as well as a number of other issues directly related to improving EAM's position in the current political situation. A few days later, on 9 July, Papandreou received a long letter signed by the representatives of EAM in Cairo (for the full text, see Iatrides 1972: 296-303) in which they complained, protested, and tried to force Papandreou into new concessions. Eventually, EAM's blackmail failed. With strong British backing,

Papandreou rejected all their demands thus forcing EAM to announce their unconditional joining the national-unity government, which took place on 2 September, 1944, with no further demands. Alas, trust between the two sides had meanwhile been entirely lost.

EAM was now in a hole. Lacking Soviet support and with only minority status in a British-controlled government, mistrustful of Papandreou, and uncertain about its future, there was little in the direction of parliamentary consociation and parliamentary pluralism that it could possibly hope for. Several Greek historians have aptly described EAM during that period as a “boat adrift” (contra, Iliou 2004). This is why its leadership remained irresolute and constantly wavering between an increasingly unrealistic resort to arms and political opportunism. This, in turn, opened the door to a series of grave miscalculations that led directly to civil war.

V. Papandreou between the British Scylla and the communist Charybdis

Given the British determination not to let Greece drift into the Soviet camp, why did the long-irresolute Greek communist leadership finally choose to employ brinkmanship, thus risking civil war? The answer, I contend, lies in the role of Prime Minister Papandreou who, finding himself from the beginning in a disadvantaged position, proved unable to turn the situation to his advantage so as to successfully defend the emerging postliberation order. His pleas for national unity notwithstanding, he in practice proved unable to secure the support of worthy political allies, chart a concrete program of action, devise a clear ideological platform and, above all, build a solid basis of support in postwar Greek society. Had he succeeded in those tasks, he should have been a much stronger defender while EAM/ELAS would have found it more difficult to challenge. As will be shown, all conditions were in place for Papandreou to succeed, but he didn't. First, however, we must understand Papandreou's strategic position in relation to those of the British and the Communists.

Table 1. Options related to EAM's potential position in postliberation Greece and chief actors' preferences

	<i>British</i>	<i>Papandreou</i>	<i>EAM/ELAS</i>
<i>A. Military and political dominance</i>			K①
<i>B. Strong political role</i>		P③	K②
<i>C. Weak political role</i>	B①	P① ↓	↓ K③
<i>D. Annihilation</i>	B②	P②	K④

Key: ① Best choice for each actor; ② Second best choice for each actor; EAM/ELAS positioned in K③ offers the only possibility for political equilibrium; an improbable choice for the communist leadership but still best than K④.

Table 1 summarizes the preferences of the three chief protagonists in the drama played over the Communists' position in postliberation Greece. For EAM/ELAS, first, the top preference was their full political *and* military dominance (K1), that is to say, the establishment of a communist regime in postliberation Greece; its second best choice was the maintenance of a strong political role in postwar politics (K2) facilitated by their strong bases of social support built during the war years. None of those options could however be tolerated by the British, whose preferences were exactly the reverse. For them, the top preference was the establishment in postwar Greece of a government that would always be friendly to them and in which the Communists could only be allowed to have a minimal role (B1); otherwise, the military annihilation of the communist threat (B2) presented as the unavoidable second best choice. It is within this framework of non-equilibrating preferences between EAM/ELAS and the British that we must place, and try to understand, Papandreou's role. Whether for British objection, his own anti-communism, or both, he would not accept a strong communist voice (position P3; coincident with K2), but he also hesitated to concede to an early British initiative towards annihilating the KKE (position P2) for fear of civil war. Papandreou, in other words, had no real strategic space; *he was locked in position P1*, which, however, was a losing position if either the Communists insisted on K1 or K2 or the British decided on B2. What could he have done? As all available evidence suggests, Papandreou's only winning strategy was to prevail upon the communist leadership to accept position K3 (that is, move *two* positions down from their top preference), thus achieving the only equilibrium possible among the three major actors (indicated by the shaded area in Table 1). In practice, such a compromise would have involved the formation of a viable, all-inclusive and British-friendly government that would allow EAM to trade junior partnership for the voluntary demobilization of their ELAS forces. Position K3 was certainly not the best option for the Communists but was still much better than risking full annihilation (K4) by British arms. It will be argued that the Communist leadership opted for escalation because Papandreou was, and, for his own failures, remained throughout his premiership, an extraordinarily weak political actor.

VI. In a quandary: Papandreou's tactical failures

Given the situation, Papandreou had two complementary strategies available for competing with the Communists. The first was to unite the dispersed anti-communist political world around his person so as to form a viable postliberation government that would not need to rely on communist support; his second strategy would have been to embrace republicanism so as to deprive EAM/ELAS of their monopoly in the antimonarchical struggle, offer his own liberal coalition a common ideological basis, and win much-needed popular support. As explained below, Papandreou's failure on both accounts weakened his own position while, at the same time, offered EAM/ELAS a first-class opportunity to remain assertive.

A. Forging a political alliance was for Papandreou not less practically feasible than it was politically necessary. It must be recalled that one of the reasons that the British chose Papandreou for the premiership was his Venizelist political past, which would presumably have made more facile his attempts to draw support from his natural allies within the liberal and republican camp. But Papandreou did not perform as expected. One possible reason is that he never enjoyed the trust of his political cohort – as it became plainly clear from his

difficulty in putting together a liberal-based government at the beginning of his premiership and *before* the Lebanon conference. Most liberal politicians thought of him as an “intruder” (Leeper 1950: 47; see also Kanellopoulos 2003: 557-8) and “a ‘tool’ of the British (Macveagh 1980: 510), and refused to consent to his appointment thinking it was just “a matter of time before he too had to step down, making room for them at the top” (Iatrides 1972: 60). Such was the unwillingness of the traditional political world to support the new prime minister’s effort that none of them accepted to be sworn in the new government together with him. Papandreou had thus to ask the general directors of the various ministries to serve as under-secretaries in his first government.

Lacking a support base of his own, Papandreou went to Lebanon determined to face the enmity of leftists, as well as liberals, but having no coherent plan. His only “visible means of support,” as MacVeagh (1980: 520) reports, were “the British and his own eloquence.” As a result, the so-called Lebanon Charter, although signed by all participating delegates accepting to form a national-unity government, was a monument of unenforceable compromise in that it included several “agreements which were clearly open to various interpretations” (Iatrides 1972: 66). When, upon returning to Cairo, Papandreou assumed the task of forming a new government based on the Lebanon agreements, and while the leftist ministers were busy in trying to blackmail the prime minister by refusing to enter his government unless their demands were met, the idle liberal politicians spent their own time intriguing against Papandreou, besides of course against each other. Here is how eyewitness MacVeagh (1980: 531) describes the situation: “Pessimism about national unity seems to be growing ... The Venizelists and the leftists both seem to be regretting that they let Papandreou get away with the Premiership, and to interpret the division he is making of the chief ministries as ‘knuckling under to the British’.” Things turned particularly sour in late August, when Papandreou, without prior consultation with his cabinet, met secretly with Churchill in Rome and agreed to transfer his government from Cairo to Italy. A few days later, three prominent liberal ministers (Sofocles Venizelos, Alexander Mylonas, and Constantine Rentis), resigned in protest and were promptly replaced with others from the conservative Populist Party. As Iatrides (1972: 112-13) notes:

The resignation of the Liberals was an event of considerable significance since it revealed Papandreou’s near-total isolation from the country’s principal political forces. [...] Having additionally [to EAM] antagonized the Liberal Party, which might otherwise have been his principal ally in the Center, he stood virtually alone. [...] Thus, as the day of liberation drew near, Papandreou’s only solid support was to come from the British government.”

When the Greek cabinet was officially transferred in early September to Salerno, Papandreou made an attempt to woo the three liberal deserters back into the government, which was however rejected as their conditions for return could not be met: a statement from Papandreou admitting his position to be dependent on his cabinet and the parties represented in it as well as the appointment of a regent in postliberation Greece (MacVeagh 1980: 604). By then, trust had been altogether lost and the government of National Unity had been reduced into “a patchwork of conflicting interests and personalities which could survive only as long as its members could see no better chance of furthering their factional aims outside it, and as long as the British authorities gave it their full and unequivocal backing” (Iatrides 1972: 109).

After liberation, there was still another reshuffling of the government in which Papandreou, trusting neither the Left nor the Liberals, gave most portfolios to personal friends and traditional Populists. Meanwhile, as the political crisis continued unchecked, the new government was facing enormous difficulties with a chaotic economic situation, the organization of a police force, and the punishment of collaborators. In that situation, lacking

trustworthy allies and unable to coordinate his cabinet members, Papandreou “proved himself little more than a weathercock, yielding to the Left, only to contradict himself later by yielding to the Right” (McNeill 1947: 160). As Leeper similarly saw it, “Papandreou tries to be a ‘fixer,’ not a leader, and always agrees with the leftists when they ask for things, laying on the British his inability to comply” (MacVeagh 1980: 653).

In sum, from April to December 1944, Papandreou, without a plan and lacking worthy political allies, stood alone and vulnerable to both the communist Left and the traditional liberal political world. His unsuccessful effort to outmaneuver the Left while at the same time placating the Liberals drew him eventually to conservative rightist positions, which further contributed decisively to the outbreak of civil war.

B. Part of Papandreou's inability to forge a solid political alliance was, to be sure, related to his second failure, namely, his disinclination to embrace republicanism and promote a permanent resolution of the burning monarchy issue in predominantly antimonarchical Greece.

Since the endorsement by King George II of the dictatorship of Metaxas in the mid-1930s the majority of interwar politicians, irrespective of their many other ideological differences, had turned into fervent opponents of the monarchy. Already in March 1942, a group of prominent figures (including Papandreou) representing the entire political spectrum, had signed in occupied Athens a petition asking that the King's return to the liberated country be determined by national plebiscite. Public opinion had also grown hostile to the throne. As indicated by British intelligence “the King and his Government had only a very small following and they are hated and looked upon as traitors by the vast majority of the people” (Mackenzie 2000: 148). Even Prime Minister Tsouderos had to admit that most royalists in Greece were of old age “whilst all the youth [was] anti-royalist, including his own children” (quoted in MacVeagh 1980: 464) while such staunch royalists as John Theotokis were now certain that Greece “will never take the King back again” (ibid.: 361).

In such a fervently antimonarchical climate, Papandreou, an heir of republican Venizelism and regular champion of reformist ideas (Hatzivassiliou 2010), had a real chance to promote republicanism and, therefore, prevent EAM's quasi-monopoly over that issue. But, like with the vicar of Bray, Papandreou's beliefs were not consistent with his political deeds. Thus, already by early 1944, he had confided that, “though the leftist republican coloring of his party forced him to continue speaking in favor of a republic, he understood the necessity of an eventual return of the king” (Petropulos 1981: 34). The first opportunity for embracing republicanism and forging a republican alliance was lost during the Lebanon Conference, when government formation was the most pressing issue. Despite the almost unanimous support of all participants to republicanism, Papandreou preferred not to touch the issue of monarchy, which made ex-premier Tsouderos lament: “As to the King question, it is too bad that something definite was not agreed on, since sooner or later, the cabinet members will begin seeing everything in relation to it, as of old” (cited in MacVeagh 1980: 526). A second opportunity for Papandreou to embrace republicanism was lost after his insistence not to accept the appointment of a Regent responsible for organizing a plebiscite on the regime issue. Already by March 1944, the liberal politicians had proposed Archbishop of Athens Damaskinos as an ideal candidate for the post of regent; EAM's leadership, who had been consulted, was also in full agreement with the proposal. Given the predominantly republican sentiment of Greek society, Papandreou's refusal to accept forcing a Regent upon the King had several adverse consequences for his premiership: it won it no popular support; it

destroyed whatever little possibilities there existed for creating a liberal alliance; and it facilitated EAM's continuing monopoly over antimonarchical sentiment.

The question is raised: would the British have ever allowed a political solution detrimental to the Greek monarchy? It is certainly true that, in general, the British stood firmly behind King George and their official policy, laid down by the Secretary of State at the beginning of war, was "to support the King of Greece and the present Greek government ... [pledging] to see them through to the end" (quoted in Macenzie 2000: 146; also Woodward 1962: 355). Yet, there were important reservations in the British support of the King in many important decision-making bodies including the FO, the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the Chiefs of Arms, and the British Embassy in Athens, all warning against "too close an association with the royal cause" (Macmillan 1967: 481). Their fears stemmed from the King's unpopularity, as well as his lack of commitment to democracy; the danger of alienating the liberal politicians; and, most ominously, the possibility of driving many moderate Greeks into the communist camp.

The idea of Regency was ripe in British minds, too, and, in fact, they exercised "constant efforts" (Frazier 1991: 46) upon King George in order to approve it. The idea had been discussed for the first time in 1943 in the Middle East Defense Committee lest "EAM could say that Britain intended to impose the King on the country by force [and] they would retain their non-communist following, and this would not be allowed to happen" (Eden 1965: 487). Later in the same year, the War Cabinet adopted a policy of Regency in combination with a plebiscite to decide about the monarchy's fate in postliberation Greece (Mackenzie 2000: 474). In accordance to the new policy, Leeper devised an elaborate plan providing for a declaration by the King that he would not return to Greece before a plebiscite was held to determine the constitutional issue, and also that a regency would be constituted, possibly under Damaskinos' authority.

What emerges from this picture is that, by liberation time, the idea of forcing a regency upon the King was favored, besides the liberals and the communists, by the British as well for a number of reasons: giving vent to widespread anti-royal feeling in Greece; possibly uniting the liberal camp; depriving EAM from their claim to monopolizing republicanism; and easing the way to a democratic plebiscite. It was only Papandreou that, as we have seen, remained hostile to this prospect and never willing to see it materialize.

VII. Explaining the Greek civil war: Unwanted choices and brinkmanship

Papandreou's failure to embrace republicanism and forge a solid liberal political alliance meant far more than his inability to form a popular and functioning government in postliberation Greece; it meant, above all, the inability to create a winnable situation in position P1 (refer to Table 1, above) so as to induce EAM/ELAS to accept a minor role in the emerging political order (position K3) and deter civil war. In view of Papandreou's failures, and the Communists' concomitant dissidence, the British moved swiftly from a strategy of cautious toleration of a limited communist role in postliberation Greece to one aiming at their annihilation (i.e., from B1 to B2). That was *the* critical point after which two further developments were set in motion and led to civil war. The first was Papandreou's decision to abandon P1, which now seemed deadlocked, and, however unwillingly, move towards P2 in alignment with his British patrons. The second development concerned EAM/ELAS's reaction. Faced with the real prospect of annihilation (K4), what was its leadership left to do? Let us briefly go back to events.

In the few weeks preceding the December bloodshed in Athens, and as the economic crisis continued unchecked and fears mounted about the Left preparing to seize power by force, the chief actors engaged in a war of positions. For the communist leadership, on one hand, the problem was how to keep all options open for an eventual power takeover. Given that EAM's small share in the government was not sufficient for guaranteeing its political prospects, wouldn't that be more advantageous for ELAS to keep their arms? For Papandreou's postliberation government and its British backers, on the other hand, the most pressing issue was the disarmament and permanent demobilization of all guerilla organizations, especially ELAS, and the establishment of a loyal national army. As Macmillan (1967: 489) summarized the case, "Unless some way can be found to disarm ELAS forces ... and to start a Greek National Army into which the better guerilla elements would be incorporated, there will be a most dangerous situation leading inevitably to civil war."

In such a climate, Papandreou, fearing that the armed forces that the British had availed in Greece were not enough to prevent a communist coup, decided, despite strong objections from both the EAM ministers and many Greek and British moderates,³ to bring back to Greece the Mountain (or "Rimini") Brigade which had been formed after the mutinies in the Middle East and was inspired by ultra-conservative ideals. In parallel, Papandreou, undoubtedly following British advice, proposed a plan of action according to which the former gendarmerie would be replaced by a National Guard (*Ethnofylaki*) while, shortly thereafter, EAM's Civil Guard (*Politofylaki*) was to be disbanded and substituted by a new force. Moreover, within ten days from 1 December, all resistance organizations were to disband and a new national army to emerge from four conscription classes. That, however, was something that EAM was not ready to accept. Already on the same day with the Rimini Brigade's arrival in Athens (9 November), George Siantos telegraphed the party functionaries to "remain at their position until prerequisites for a normal development of the situation are secured ... The *Politofylaki* should remain in charge until [an] *Ethnofylaki* corresponding to the people's will is formed" (cited in Iatrides 1972: 157-8).

Things took a decisive turn for the worse on 28 November when Papandreou, having the initial consent of the ministers representing EAM, proposed the creation of a national army consisting of two equal-strength brigades, one composed of mostly nationalist forces, the other of ELAS forces; all other bands, whether rightist or leftist, were to demobilize by 10 December. Shortly thereafter, the permanently irresolute KKE leadership rejected the demobilization proposal and asked the EAM ministers to resign from the government. On 2 December, EAM called for a mass demonstration on Constitution Square, Athens, to be held in the following day. And when it became clear that the British and Papandreou were not prepared to tolerate the mobilization of such a movement-like crowd, everybody just realized that they had reached the very brink.

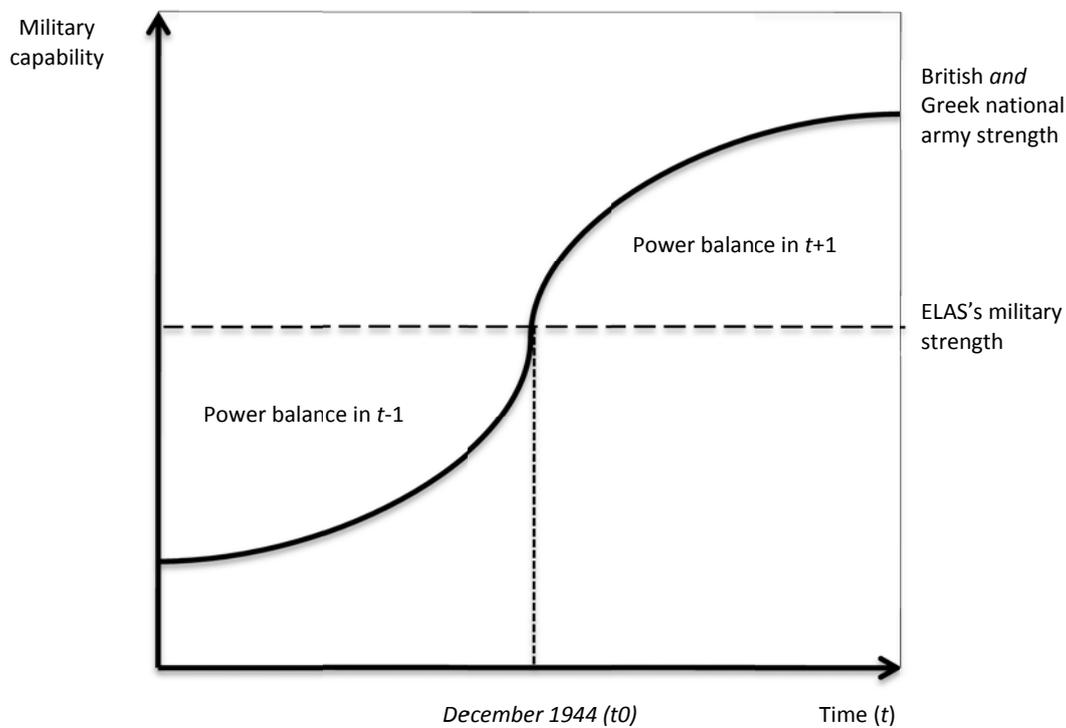
Prima facie, the communist leadership's decision to openly confront Papandreou's government despite the latter's full backing by the British and in the absence of own outside support seems not to have been a reasonable decision.⁴ Even if successful in bringing down

³ For instance, Colonel Woodhouse, who had considerable first-hand knowledge of Greek in-war realities as well as excellent grasp of Greek psychology, "categorically advised against" bringing the brigade to Greece at this time. He, moreover, characterized the move as "provocative, even if unintentionally," and viewed it as "the most important single factor contributing to the loss of faith by EAM/ELAS in Papandreou and his supporters" (Woodhouse 1948: 215).

⁴ That the communist decision was incomprehensible to Papandreou, becomes obvious from his own reflections ex post facto: "So many were the waverings of the Communist Party during 1944 between revolutionary and political tactics that any certitude was lost. However, we wanted to hope ... thinking simply that, since they

that particular government without causing civil war, what would have been a better alternative to it given the British determination not to allow the Left's predominance in Greece? But, on the other hand, nor did moderation appear to the Communists as a realistic choice. Theirs was after all a revolutionary party with widespread support throughout the country. In that predicament, EAM's only choice was *brinkmanship*, that is, the deliberate creation by some agency in jeopardy of a grave risk situation intended to intimidate an adversary by drawing him into the same risk. Such tactics are chosen particularly when "the outcome is partly determined by events and processes that are manifestly somewhat beyond [one's] comprehension and control" (Schelling 1960: 201), which is exactly what EAM experienced in the few weeks between Greece's liberation in October and the December insurgency.

Figure 2. The shifting military balance between the opposing forces



The situation resulting in the communist insurgency of December 1944 is summarized in Figure 2. The general demobilization of resistance organizations, combined with the creation of a (British-controlled) national army, was certain to alter significantly the balance of military power to the detriment of EAM/ELAS. This led the communist leadership to a negative assessment of their future capabilities, which, through a "highly simplistic and

(Contd.) _____

offered us Greece in October, when they were in full control, they should be idiots to attempt [an] Insurgency in December, when their defeat was certain" (Papandreou 1948).

biased process of estimation [which] ignored probabilities and emphasized loss” (Gross Stein 1991: 53) rather than pay-off, led eventually to the outbreak of civil war.

Conclusions

This article, first, departing from most previous accounts of the civil war that broke out in Greece in December 1944, which typically feature only two major contenders, the British and the Communists, has offered a novel interpretation based on the dynamic interactions of no less than *five* parts including Prime Minister Papandreou, the traditional political world, and the Greek monarch. Second, by focusing on Papandreou’s leadership, more particularly, this article has shown that the civil war in Greece, far from being an inevitable outcome given the configuration at that time of opposing forces, could in fact be deterred had the prime minister chosen a strategy aimed at achieving a postwar equilibrium situation in which EAM would play a limited role. To this purpose, Papandreou had two complementary strategies available: forge a liberal alliance around his person while embracing republicanism and, possibly, championing the idea of Regency. Failing in both, Papandreou proved an unreliable defender of the postliberation order. Finally, following previous research (cf., Pappas 2008), this article points to the need to bring individual political leadership back into the analysis of such complex phenomena as civil wars, compare them, and build theories to be systematically tested.

By the way of conclusion, one last note is in order. This article, heavily reliant on the counterfactual method, has argued that Papandreou had at least two strategies available for deterring civil war and that all necessary conditions for their adoption, and implementation, were available during the critical period between April and December of 1944. If further proof for the validity of such an argument were necessary, consequent history is there to provide it. By January 1945, when the first phase of the civil war was over, a Regency had already been established in Greece with British authorization and the Liberals had coalesced and come to power. King George was to return to Greece after the 1946 plebiscite. Meanwhile, after having contributed to the outbreak of civil war for lack of strategic acumen and political foresight, all three chief actors stood firmly on the losing side: Papandreou had resigned; the British, besides their own military losses, were disgraced for having waged war against former allies during the anti-Nazi struggle; and the Communists, having lost in the battlefield, were now ordered to demobilize their guerilla forces while an even more adverse future was for them still ahead.

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