

## Conflicting Directives: The SOE and the Greek Left

ANDRE GEROLYMATOS

In the summer of 1940, and until the United States and the Soviet Union entered the Second World War, irregular warfare, blockade and mass bombing were the only alternatives left to the British to engage the Axis in any substantive manner. As early as May 27, 1940, the Chiefs of Staff were considering limited strikes against the continent by British forces. This strategy also included the theory that by arming the general population of occupied Europe, they would be able to instigate a mass uprising against the Axis forces in conjunction with the British invasion.<sup>1</sup> The concept was approved by the War Cabinet which under Churchill's direction emphasized that "...this form of activity was of the highest importance, that a special organization would be required, and as the plans to put these subversive operations into effect, together with the necessary preparations and training should be proceeded with as a matter of urgency."<sup>2</sup> As a result the Special Operations Executive (SOE) was established in July 1940 and Winston Churchill turned to its first director Hugh Dalton and declared "Set Europe Ablaze."<sup>3</sup> Churchill's bold statement underlined the fact that initially the overall policy of the new organization was to assist the occupied Europeans to organize armed resistance and mass uprising against the Nazis. The SOE was to prepare for this eventuality by parachuting specialists into occupied Europe to help train, arm and assist resistance forces in sabotage activity while waiting for the appropriate



moment when the British Army could effect landings that would coincide with a mass uprising in the targeted country. In part, the Chiefs of Staff based the integration of subversion with overall strategy on a report drafted by the Military Intelligence Research (MIR) of the Directorate of Military Intelligence, prior to its incorporation into the SOE, and in response to Churchill's enthusiasm for irregular warfare.<sup>4</sup>

In reality the task facing the SOE was formidable partly because little was known about the resistance groups in occupied Europe and partly because the new organization was an unwelcome addition to the intelligence community. The latter consideration resulted in a bitter and acrimonious conflict between the SOE and the older intelligence establishments that characterized their relations until the end of the war. To some extent, SOE's unpopularity within the intelligence community stemmed from the manner of its establishment. Once the War Cabinet decided to create the SOE, the new body was claimed by Section D of the Secret Intelligence Service (established to conduct subversive activity) and by MIR of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (designed to organize guerrilla and irregular warfare behind enemy lines). Indeed, as it turned out, the SOE rather than becoming subordinate to any of these organizations ended up absorbing both Section D and MIR as well as Electra House, the propaganda unit of the Foreign Office.

Another important factor in the development of the SOE was Hugh Dalton, the first minister responsible for the organization. Dalton not only lobbied hard to get control of the SOE but became a strong advocate of the notion of mass uprisings and was convinced that subversion and resistance were only possible if implemented by left-wing forces in occupied Europe. In Dalton's view, the role of the new organization was to create chaos and revolution as well as deal with trade unionists and socialists.<sup>5</sup> At best, Dalton's understanding of the situation in occupied Europe was simplistic and greatly overrated the power and ability of left-wing organizations to mobilize entire societies for a call to arms.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, Dalton's claims raised expectations that the SOE, or any other organization for that matter, would be hard pressed to achieve. However, Dalton was not alone in promoting such a policy. The first

directive issued to the SOE by the Chiefs of Staff on November 25, 1940, also emphasized subversion and the organization of popular uprisings against the Axis that would eventually coincide with British surgical invasions on the continent.<sup>7</sup> In theory, the idea of mass bombing and mass uprisings displayed a degree of optimism for a return to a limited offensive against the Axis. In practice, however, this strategy was beyond the limited resources of Great Britain, and the Chiefs of Staff quickly regarded the strategy of mass uprisings with considerable skepticism.<sup>8</sup>

By the summer of 1941, the Joint Planning Staff had concluded that to support the resistance forces throughout Europe in 1942 would require the commitment of over two hundred aircraft. At the same time, to transport men and material for a general uprising also meant an all-out effort by bomber command for a six-month period.<sup>9</sup> In August, the Chiefs of Staff rejected the strategy of mass uprisings, they questioned the claims of the SOE to provide resistance forces on the scale envisaged and doubted if these forces could be controlled sufficiently to support rather than hinder conventional operations.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the logistical problems that proved a major impediment to support the mass uprisings, the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 diverted over three million German forces to Russia - effectively accomplishing the primary purpose of the resistance armies by tying up large numbers of German units. The Joint Planning Staff recommended instead that the role of the SOE should be aimed at first instigating subversive propaganda,<sup>11</sup> sabotage, and other covert activities. The organization of secret armies in occupied Europe was relegated to a secondary role in British strategic planning. According to a report of the Joint Planning Staff:

If the British Army is to return to the continent in the final stages of the war, the assistance of local patriot forces would be essential at some period of the operations. Our expeditionary force would be enormously assisted if part of these local patriot forces were previously secretly organized and armed so that they could be employed effectively in interrupting communications, attacking airdromes, and other diversionary opera-



tions... We agree that secret armies can only operate effectively if supported by fully equipped forces.<sup>12</sup>

The rejection by the Chiefs of Staff of the mass uprising strategy effectively undermined one of the primary objectives of the SOE. As a result the organization now lacked a clear direction in addition to facing growing opposition by the traditional intelligence community and Services over SOE's autonomy as well as its access to Britain's limited resources. Dalton, however, was able to redefine the role for the organization by persuading Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff that the SOE was ideally suited to organize the resistance forming in occupied Europe and:

...to cause constant embarrassment to the occupying forces, and prevent any reduction in their numbers. But they should keep their main organizations underground and avoid any attempt at large-scale risings or ambitious paramilitary operations which could only result in severe oppression and the loss of key men. They should do all they can to prepare a widespread underground organization ready to strike hard later, when we give the signal.<sup>13</sup>

Although the SOE survived with a more modest mandate, the use of subversion and revolutionary organizations as the ideal instruments of a resistance movement were not abandoned and remained SOE policy until the end of the war.<sup>14</sup> In part it was the legacy of the mass uprisings strategy and the influence of Hugh Dalton, but it was also an integral element of SOE's concept of guerrilla warfare and resistance activities. According to the *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea*, issued on May 27, 1945, "...subversive activities must be based on a political concept. Effective sabotage and or guerrillas [sic] can only thrive if a revolutionary atmosphere has been created previously through political organizations".<sup>15</sup>

Within these parameters the ideal candidates for resistance, guerrilla warfare and sabotage work were those who already had some clandestine experience and practice in defying established author-

ity. In Greece, even before the country was occupied by the Axis, the communists and republicans opposed to the royalist dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas were some of the early recruits of Section D and later of the SOE. The Metaxas dictatorship, begun in 1936, was the culmination of almost two decades of political upheaval that plagued the Greek state from the First World War. During this period Greek society was divided between the followers of Eleftherios Venizelos, who eventually supported a republican constitution, and the advocates of monarchy. Although the Greek Communist Party was small and played only a marginal role in this period, it was singled out by the dictatorship and outlawed as a danger to the state. Forced underground, the communists proved adept at clandestine work and hence ideal recruits for the SOE. At first, those who were prepared to work for the SOE were more concerned with acquiring weapons and using them against dictatorship, than from any particular desire to fight the Axis.<sup>16</sup> As far as it concerned the SOE and its predecessor Section D, there was little interest in the political or personal motives of their recruits - the main objective was to create a network of underground cells in Greece. First as a precaution against Metaxas, who was considered pro-German, and second to prepare the country for possible occupation. However, after Metaxas resisted the Italian attack against Greece in October 1940, the British abandoned their suspicions of the Greek dictator and the SOE concentrated on preparing for the likelihood of an Axis occupation of Greece.<sup>17</sup> However, for the most part SOE activities in Greece prior to the occupation were limited to establishing contacts and finding potential recruits. After the SOE incorporated Section D it inherited two Greek clandestine cells organized in early 1941. The first under, Alexander Zannas and made up of conservative republicans, was based in Thessaloniki, while a second group, headed by E. Bakirdzis, was organized in Athens and included not only liberal elements but also more radical left-wing republicans.<sup>18</sup>

When the Germans invaded Greece in April 1941, SOE activities were limited to a number of demolitions and the destruction of several bridges. As the front was collapsing the SOE representatives in Greece frantically attempted to equip their embryonic cells with radios and explosives but these efforts proved ineffectual. The



speed of the German advance gave time for only the most rudimentary plans for subversive activities let alone the creation of resistance networks. According to Bickham Sweet-Escott, the SOE managed to "bully" seven wireless transmitters from SIS (Secret Intelligence Service)<sup>19</sup>, but only one, left to Bakirdzis, ever made contact with the SOE in Cairo.<sup>20</sup> Thus with the exception of Prometheus (the code name used by Bakirdzis), at the beginning of the Axis occupation, all other information concerning Greece came from escaped British soldiers and Greeks who made their way to the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

Directives concerning the SOE in general were the prerogative of the War Cabinet or the Defense Committee and issued through the Minister of Economic Warfare, directives on operational matters were given by the Chiefs of Staff and by the commanders-in-chief of a theater of war. After the Axis occupation of the Balkans, the direction and coordination of clandestine activities in Greece fell within the jurisdiction of SOE Cairo and the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. The head of SOE Cairo answered to London headquarters in matters of general policy but with respect to field operations received guidance from the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. At best, this was an awkward arrangement compounded by overlapping with other intelligence organizations in the Middle East as well as with the various paramilitary forces which sought to find use for their respective organizations. Equally complicated, the Cairo branch of the SOE had no explicit direction on whether military expediency took precedence over political considerations. As stated above, the SOE in London had control of overall policy, but the Cairo branch had to comply, at least in overall strategy, with the operational directives of the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. In this respect, the absence of political direction was not unique. In 1941 the Cairo SOE was directed to implement subversion, sabotage and guerrilla warfare activities as well as organize resistance groups in Greece. Under these circumstances the immediate needs of the war effort took precedence while political considerations were relegated to a secondary role. Another consideration was that after the British debacle in Greece and Crete, optimistic assumptions of the SOE's ability to fight a guerrilla war in occupied Greece seemed remote. Furthermore, in 1941 the SOE

was not involved with any Greek resistance organization, in which case the potential conflict inherent in the directives issued to the Cairo SOE remained mute.

It is not surprising that in the early stages of the development of the Greek resistance, little thought was given to the discrepancy between using left-wing forces and how this would impact on supporting the Greek monarchy in the post-war period. As the anonymous author of the *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea* points out:

The fact that resistance movements and eventually guerrilla warfare had to be built on left-wing political elements was well known to all concerned, and accepted in the SOE directives of the Chiefs-of-Staff for 1943 and by the Prime Minister in his directives on our policy to Greece.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, after the disastrous defeats of the British army in Greece and Crete, and setbacks in North Africa, recrimination and not the Greek resistance was the order of the day. In the Middle East, the SOE was apportioned a major share of the blame for failing to play a more active role in the Greek campaign.<sup>23</sup> In fact, future political susceptibilities were obscured by the military problems of defending Egypt and the Suez Canal as well as protecting Persia and Syria. Striking at the Axis by organizing guerrilla forces in Greece and Yugoslavia was a latter byproduct that evolved incrementally and, in the case of Greece, more by chance than by design.

In the summer of 1941, however, the political and military developments in the Middle East placed the Cairo SOE in a unique and at the same time vulnerable position. On the one hand, the Cairo SOE achieved greater independence partly because of its distance from London and partly from the structure of the chain of command that placed SOE operations in the Balkans under the jurisdiction of Middle East headquarters. Initially, GHQ Middle East showed little interest in activities of the organization and SOE Cairo was able to maintain a considerable degree of autonomy. On the other hand, the SOE, and the shroud of secrecy surrounding it,



caused considerable suspicion and skepticism among some of the political and military representatives of the traditional British services and raised doubts over the usefulness of this new organization.<sup>24</sup> Oliver Lyttleton, the Minister of State in Egypt in 1941, wrote in his memoirs after the war that he had "incontestable proof" of the "lack of security, waste of public funds and inefficiencies of the SOE."<sup>25</sup> These charges and allegations of wrongdoing and corruption by other officials were dismissed after Frank Nelson, the Executive Director of the SOE, conducted his own investigation in Cairo. However, in the interests of maintaining the confidence of the services in the Middle East, Nelson decided to recall the heads of SO1 (Special Operations Propaganda) and SO2 (Special Operations Subversion)<sup>26</sup> as well as their immediate subordinates. The reason underlying the accusations and intrigue against the SOE, writes Bickham Sweet-Escott, who accompanied Nelson, was that the Middle East sections of the SOE were seen as interlopers "and being bigger and somewhat less secret than the older secret organizations...provided an easy target for those who wished to make a reputation for integrity and ruthlessness by exposing them, and for empire-builders who saw the chance of creating jobs for themselves by denouncing incompetence...."<sup>27</sup>

Unlike other agencies, the SOE did not have the protection of a government department in the Middle East, as was the case with the older services. In addition, the politically charged atmosphere surrounding the jurisdictional turmoil among the British Services in the Middle East was compounded by the conflicts within the SOE itself. The piecemeal development of the SOE had created, to some degree, a hybrid establishment that caused considerable friction between its two main departments. According to one Foreign Office document:

...the two branches [SO1 and SO2] behaved exactly as if they were rival organizations and the skill and enthusiasm with which they conducted their demarcation battle would have delighted many latter-day trade unionists. It would certainly have delighted their common enemy, had he known what they were up to.<sup>28</sup>

The situation was made even more difficult after SOE Cairo incorporated G(R), the Middle East section of MIR. G(R) was made up of professional officers who had already conducted commando and other paramilitary activities in North Africa, but as a result of military setbacks were left without employment. Sweet-Escott, at the time the assistant to the head of SOE Cairo, writes that the amalgamation took place at the suggestion of GHQ Middle East and was in fact an attempt by the military to take over the SOE.<sup>29</sup>

In 1941, the Cairo SOE was divided in two sections: Special Operations, responsible for paramilitary activity and placed under the professional soldiers of G(R), and the Policy and Agents Directorate that controlled political action and agents in the field. The two branches remained segregated, despite several administrative reorganizations, for the duration of the war and had little knowledge of what the other was doing.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the merger between the professional soldiers of G(R) with the operations branch of the SOE had a significant impact on the future development of the SOE in the Middle East as well as on operations in the Balkans. It certainly sheds some light on the early SOE operations in Greece and places in context the Harling Mission that led to the first major act of sabotage in Greece and the instigation of guerrilla warfare that coincided with the development of the Greek resistance. In this respect the Harling Mission represents a critical threshold in the development of the Greek resistance and the study of the SOE in Greece. As an operation the Harling Mission was a singular success in achieving the destruction of the Gorgopotamos Viaduct, and it was the first (and the last) occasion whereupon guerrillas from the left and the right of the political spectrum cooperated in fighting the Axis. Although this act of sabotage came a month too late to have an impact on the battle for North Africa, the operation itself and the early intelligence activities in Greece set the pattern for relations between the SOE and left-wing organizations in Greece. Certainly, these events initiated a dramatic expansion of SOE activities in Greece and culminated with the political crisis in Cairo in August 1943 that almost destroyed the SOE because of its dealings with the Greek Left.

The first of these events was the failure of a combined operation based on the Greek island of Antiparos that included representa-



tives from the political and operations directorates of the SOE and MI9 (the escape organization). The objectives of the mission were to gather information, conduct sabotage and to facilitate the escape of British soldiers and Greek nationals to the Middle East. The operation lasted from November 1941 to January 1942 and, although initially successful, ended in disaster. The head of the mission, John Atkinson, had little experience in covert operations and displayed considerable recklessness and indiscretion required for clandestine work. Eventually, he was captured by the Italian security service and in the subsequent interrogation provided the Italians with the names of SOE agents and contacts he had in Greece. Many were arrested while some managed to escape to the Middle East, including Bakirdzis, the head of the Prometheus network in Athens.<sup>31</sup> Atkinson's confession removed from the scene a great number of prominent Athenians who may have provided a moderate leadership for the embryonic Greek resistance. For the SOE in Cairo, the debacle of the Atkinson mission aggravated tensions between the professional soldiers from the Operations Directorate and the intelligence specialists from the political branch whose agents and networks had been compromised. As a result the staff of the political directorate made a concerted effort to withhold as much information as possible from their counterparts in operations.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, late it was argued by C. M. Woodhouse that when the Harling Mission was parachuted into Greece the commanders of the team, Edmund Myers and Woodhouse, did not receive any background information on the situation in occupied Greece from the political directorate. Even though the directorate had extensive knowledge of Greek clandestine organizations and the growing politicization of the resistance movement.<sup>33</sup> There is no doubt that the political branch was aware of the growing role of the Greek communist party and the Greek republicans, since after the Atkinson affair contact with Greece depended almost exclusively on individuals and networks hostile to the Greek government-in-exile and the monarchy.<sup>34</sup> The reluctance to brief the members of the Harling mission, according to the conventional explanation, was the result of the strained relations between the two SOE branches caused by the events mentioned above. Yet the objective of the Harling Mission was to destroy the Gorgopotamos Viaduct and after completing the

mission the team, with the exception of Woodhouse and one other member, was to be evacuated by submarine.<sup>35</sup> Under these terms of reference there was little need to provide the Harling group with an extensive briefing.<sup>36</sup> It was only later when the team was not evacuated and re-designated as the British Military Mission (BMM) that the lack of political intelligence became a major drawback.

Indeed, the events preceding the Harling Mission and immediately following the operation offer additional insight into SOE's involvement with the Greek Left. After the escape of Bakirdzis, his successors operated under the code name of Prometheus II and received their codebook from an SOE agent named Alexatos. This agent also supplied radios, equipment and funds to the Greek Communist Party (KKE), as well as to the communist-led resistance movement, EAM (National Liberation Front) and EKKA (National and Social Liberation).<sup>37</sup> In effect all these organizations later proved to be of considerable embarrassment and an impediment to British policy towards post-war Greece. However, in the absence of exact British documents, Alexatos provides one of the few examples of how the SOE and the Greek Left maintained contact. Unfortunately, the SOE agent Alexatos, despite his significant role in the development of espionage and sabotage in Greece, remains a mystery. What is known about him is sketchy and drawn mostly from Greek accounts that describe him as a smuggler who was recruited by the SOE before the occupation of Greece.<sup>38</sup> Alexatos acted as the principle contact between the SOE in Izmir, headed by David Pawson, and left-wing organizations in Greece. As a smuggler, with considerable experience in getting in and out of Greece as well as countries in the Middle East, Alexatos proved of considerable value to the SOE in Izmir. Between 1941-1942 he brought into Greece funds, equipment, and radios, as well as instructions for several groups that enabled Pawson to maintain contact with the Greek left-wing and republican organizations.<sup>39</sup> It is suggested by another Greek SOE agent, Alexandros Levides, that both Pawson and Alexatos were sympathetic to the anti-monarchist and communist networks,<sup>40</sup> but Levides was more than likely unaware that the mandate of the SOE included using such organizations even before Greece was occupied. To this end the Political Directorate of the SOE in the Middle East by the fall of 1941 had established and maintained



contact with the various organizations of the Greek Left including the communist party. It is not surprising, therefore, that Prometheus II, an organization hostile to the Greek government and concerned with intelligence and sabotage, was instructed by SOE Cairo to prepare and organize the reception for the Harling Mission in Greece.<sup>41</sup>

The second event that characterized SOE's relationship with the Greek resistance and the Greek Left was the after affects of a combined Anglo-Greek mission to destroy the Corinth Canal and conduct additional sabotage and subversive activities in the spring of 1942. The code name for the mission was Midas 614 and was led by a Greek officer, Ioannis Tsigantes.<sup>42</sup> The motives of the Greek government-in-exile, particularly those of Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, the Minister of Defense, were to establish an organization in order to direct and control the resistance as well as secure access to information about the situation in Greece independent of the British services.<sup>43</sup> The latter for reasons of security as well as for political considerations were reluctant to share their intelligence with the Greek government-in-exile.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, Tsigantes proved unable to unite the various resistance groups forming in Athens and became entangled in political intrigues of the Athenian underground that eventually led to his death at the hands of the Italian security service.<sup>45</sup> Tsigantes' failure also had other repercussions particularly on SOE perceptions of the development of the Greek resistance. Despite the growing power of EAM and its military wing ELAS (National Popular Liberation Army), as well as the fact that Tsigantes represented the Greek government-in-exile and the king, neither the leaders of the pre-war parties nor the officer corps indicated any willingness to play a role in the resistance. Part of the reason for this position could be explained by the fact that some of these individuals preferred to wait out the war and assumed that liberation would restore them to power, while others refused to meet with Tsigantes since he had become a security risk.<sup>46</sup> In either case, the lack of interest by the Greek Right to organize served to validate SOE's original premise that only left-wing and revolutionary organizations were prepared to take part in clandestine activities and fight the Axis.

The second part of Tsigantes' mission was equally unsuccessful. The Midas team failed to block or destroy the Corinth Canal.

The team also found it impractical to sabotage the bridge at Karyon in order to cut the rail link between Athens and Thessaloniki thus disrupt German supply lines from Greece to North Africa. On the other hand, Tsigantes did ascertain that the destruction of the Gorgopotamos Viaduct was feasible and could achieve the same result. He requested permission from SOE to proceed with this new target as well as the necessary explosives to sabotage the viaduct. The reply from SOE Cairo was that Harling Mission was given the task of destroying the Gorgopotamos Viaduct and afterwards the responsibility of directing the development of guerrilla warfare in Greece. By this time Tsigantes was considered unreliable by the British and forsaken by Kanellopoulos because he had exceeded his orders and was becoming a political embarrassment to the Greek government-in-exile.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, the failure of the Midas team and the success of the Harling Mission provided the opportunity for Colonel C.M. Keble, the Chief of Staff to Lord Glenconnor, the new head of SOE Cairo, to establish a role for the SOE in the Greece and the Balkans. The Harling Mission demonstrated to the skeptics at GHQ Middle East that the SOE could coordinate irregular warfare with military objectives. In addition, it enabled the organization to justify its existence, particularly after the extraordinary assertions made earlier by Dalton that occupied Europe was on the verge of revolt. The SOE, thus far, had failed to prove the veracity of these claims.

Although the destruction of the Gorgopotamos Viaduct came too late to have any impact on the Battle of El Alamein, it was hailed by the SOE and British propaganda as a spectacular achievement of the Greek resistance and the British. Keble was able to capitalize on the positive outcome of the Harling operation and convince GHQ Middle East to keep the team in Greece and establish the first British Military Mission in the Greek mountains. By this time SOE Cairo was receiving considerable political intelligence that left little doubt that the resistance in Greece was dominated by EAM-ELAS, the communist-led movement and EDES (National Republican Greek League) a staunch republican organization. These assessments were later supplemented by the reports from the BMM that also made it clear to SOE Cairo that republican and communist leaders controlled the guerrilla bands and main



resistance organizations.<sup>48</sup>

Keble and Lord Glenconnor, however, were not interested in the political character of the Greek resistance but determined to pursue their own policies and organize guerrilla armies in the Balkans to enhance the role of the SOE. To this end no less than eighty British Military Missions were set up in the Greek mountains to support and coordinate the guerrilla bands that had expanded very quickly after the success of the Gorgopotamos operation. SOE headquarters in London was neither consulted nor kept abreast of the events unfolding in Greece. Keble and Glenconnor had taken the view that SOE Cairo was only responsible to GHQ Middle East for operational matters and in this respect independent of Baker Street.<sup>49</sup> Despite the critical role that Keble played in SOE Cairo and his policy towards the Greek and Yugoslav resistance, very little is known about him from extant records. According to J.G. Beever, Keble was recommended to SOE by GHQ Middle East who described him as a regular officer of great energy and ability, with recent background in the intelligence branch in Cairo. He was not personally known to anyone at SOE headquarters in London but the appointment was made since Keble enjoyed the confidence of the military in the Middle East.<sup>50</sup> Unknown to SOE, Keble's previous position in the military intelligence branch (Keble was a member of MI14, Military Intelligence Germany) permitted him access to ultra decrypts even after he joined SOE Cairo. Post-war accounts of SOE veterans describe Keble as unscrupulous, ruthless, and an empire builder, and an opportunist, as well as a man with extraordinary energy and an efficient staff officer.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of his personal characteristics, Keble was the architect and instigator of SOE's cooperation with the Greek Left, communist and republican controlled resistance and guerrilla organizations in the Balkans.<sup>52</sup>

In hindsight, Keble's success in organizing a major SOE presence in the Greek mountains came as a result of the convergence of several key factors. First, in the spring of 1943 the Chiefs of Staff and GHQ Middle East came to the view that the resistance in Greece and the Balkans could offer considerable benefit by organizing guerrilla armies who could tie down Axis forces.<sup>53</sup> In addition, Keble was able to exploit the success of the Gorgopotamos

operation and convince the Chiefs of Staff that the Greek resistance along with the Harling Mission would be essential to Operation Mincemeat.<sup>54</sup> Animals, the Greek component of Operation Mincemeat, proved a major success and managed to divert to Greece seven German and twelve Italian divisions.<sup>55</sup> This further validated Keble's and Glenconnor's policy with respect to the SOE in Greece and its growing contribution to the strategic objectives of GHQ Middle East. Finally, the Tsigantes mission had demonstrated that the Greek Right and the Greek government-in-exile were not in a position to direct the resistance. Few right-wing organizations, led primarily by Greek officers, lacked popular following while many were associated with the extreme Right or with the Metaxas dictatorship. As matters stood in the spring of 1943 the only alternative was for the BMM to assume the coordination and direction of the Greek resistance. However, the BMM, failed to exercise the degree of control over the resistance, with the exception of EDES, that Keble and Glenconnor assumed would be the case after the SOE established a partnership with the Greek communists, republicans and other radical organizations. Although initially a republican organization, EDES was outmaneuvered and outnumbered by the communist-led EAM-ELAS and depended on the BMM exclusively for supplies and political support. In effect, the establishment of the BMM in the Greek mountains, the collaboration with the Greek Left, and the decision of the GHQ Middle East to employ the SOE and the resistance in a strategic role, underlined the theory that for the most part only revolutionary groups were capable of mass resistance, subversion and guerrilla warfare. Unfortunately, Keble and Glenconnor did not survive the political fallout with the Greek Left, since SOE's presence in Greece by the fall of 1943 was proving a political embarrassment to the British Foreign Office and the Greek government-in-exile.

The defeat of the Africa Corps in North Africa followed by the Russian victory at Stalingrad created a new geo-political reality in southeastern Europe, whereby political considerations came into direct conflict with military objectives. Accordingly, the Foreign Office's support for George II and the Greek government-in-exile, contrasted sharply with SOE's success in mobilizing and supporting left-wing and republican resistance forces in occupied Greece.



Regardless of the fact that the Foreign Office was kept abreast of SOE's activities in Greece after the country was occupied, in 1943 the growing proximity of the Soviet armies to the Balkans raised the specter of a post-war communist Greece. The Foreign Office, as a result, attributed the growing power of the Greek Left to SOE's support of the communist led EAM-ELAS organizations. In March 1943, the Foreign Office demanded the suspension of all SOE activities in Greece but was prevented by the intervention of the Chiefs of Staff on the strong recommendation of the Middle East Defense Committee.<sup>56</sup> Matters had come to a head in August 1943 when Edmund Myers, the head of the BMM in Greece, brought with him to Cairo a delegation of six representatives from the major resistance organizations including the communist-controlled EAM-ELAS.<sup>57</sup> The delegation met with the Greek government-in-exile as well as with British officials, but failed to reach any agreement on the future of the monarchy and the composition of the current or post-liberation government. As a result, the six resistance representatives were unceremoniously returned to Greece.<sup>58</sup> The inability to find any compromise over the constitutional problem of the Greek monarchy and the impression created by Operation Animals of imminent liberation triggered a civil war between ELAS and the other guerrilla forces in Greece in October 1943.

In the ensuing controversy created by the arrival and failure of the Cairo delegation, the SOE was held accountable by the Foreign Office and GHQ Middle East as the main culprit for foisting a political crisis on the British authorities.<sup>59</sup> For a time it appeared that the SOE might lose its independence<sup>60</sup> and SOE Cairo survived only at the expense of having its activities placed under the operational control of the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. In addition, the detractors of the SOE succeeded in the removal of Keble and Lord Glenconnor and the replacement of Charles Hambro, the executive head of the SOE in London, by Colin Gubbins.<sup>61</sup> Although the SOE was quickly coming under military control, the loss of independence ironically gave the organization more latitude in dealing with the resistance regardless of the political affiliations of the groups.<sup>62</sup> Once the organization came under the direct jurisdiction of a theater command its activities were defined by military and not political considerations. Another deci-

sive factor was Churchill, who in the Spring of 1943 had outlined SOE policy in Greece leaving little doubt that the Greek Left would continue to receive support from the British:

In view of operational importance attached to subversive activities in Greece, there can be no question of SOE refusing to have dealings with a given group merely on the grounds that political sentiments of the group are opposed to the [Greek] King and government, but subject to special operational necessity SOE should always veer in the direction of groups willing to support the [Greek] King and the government and furthermore impress on such other groups as may be anti-monarchical the fact that the [Greek] King and government enjoy the fullest support of HMG government.<sup>63</sup>

The SOE survived the imbroglio of 1943 because Churchill supported the organization and mistrusted the Foreign Office and because the Greek and Yugoslav guerrilla forces represented a potential military asset for Britain's Mediterranean strategy. After the successful allied landings in Sicily,<sup>64</sup> Churchill's attention was drawn to the Mediterranean as an alternative to the proposed allied invasion of France. On July 19, 1943, he informed the Chiefs of Staff that "I do not believe that 27 Anglo-American divisions are sufficient for Overlord in view of the extraordinary fighting efficiency of the German Army and the much larger forces they could so readily bring to bear against our troops even if the landings were successfully accomplished."<sup>65</sup>

The fundamental factor, as far as it concerned the immediate future of the SOE in Cairo and its relationship with the Greek Left, was that the surrender of Italy on September 8, 1943, offered new opportunities for the Allies in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. The Italian collapse resulted in the capture of a several islands in the eastern Aegean<sup>66</sup> and provided the British with the possibility for a greater offensive in the southeastern Mediterranean by advancing to the larger islands and taking Rhodes. Churchill was convinced that the Italian forces in the Balkans would cooperate with the resistance groups in Greece and Yugoslavia which,



combined with an attack against the Germans in the Aegean islands, would draw Turkey into the war and push the German army out of Southeastern Europe.<sup>67</sup> Regardless of the political ramifications of the Greek resistance and military disappointments in the Aegean islands, Churchill urged the Chiefs of Staff to carry out a study of the situation in the Mediterranean "with particular reference to the growing resistance...which is developing in varying degrees in all the Balkan countries."<sup>68</sup> Churchill's request to the Chiefs of Staff came shortly after he had studied the reports of partisan activity in Greece and Yugoslavia and after his meeting with Myers, who as a result of Foreign Office pressure was not permitted to return to the BMM in Greece. In November 1943 the Chiefs of Staff, despite the British set-backs in the Dodecanese and the failure to capture Rhodes,<sup>69</sup> recommended the continuation of an active Mediterranean strategy and proposed that the guerrilla forces in Greece and Yugoslavia be reinforced to harass the Germans in the Balkans.<sup>70</sup> Once again military realities forced political considerations into the background. Later in the year the Chiefs of Staff decided that the guerrilla forces in the Balkans had a strategic role to play in tying down as many German divisions as possible and hindering re-enforcement of the Normandy beachhead.<sup>71</sup> Churchill certainly resented the Greek communists and occasionally vented his frustration by threatening to denounce EAM-ELAS, but strategic considerations left him little choice but to sustain SOE's relationship with the Greek left-wing resistance organizations until the country was liberated in October 1944.

In a recent study of Churchill and the Intelligence Services, David Stafford contends that Churchill was vehemently opposed to ELAS and made his views known to Myers, when the latter met with him in London on October 2, 1943. Shortly afterwards Churchill informed Anthony Eden that the EAM-ELAS "be starved and struck at every means in our power." Stafford concludes, "From then on Churchill's combative anti-Communist views dictated the SOE line on Greece."<sup>72</sup> Churchill's frustration with the Greek Left in the fall of 1943 was a reaction to the objections raised by Greece's king George II not only with the British Prime Minister but also with Roosevelt over the August visit of the resistance delegation to Cairo.<sup>73</sup> Yet Churchill's outburst did not generate any significant

change in British policy towards the Greek Left. One year later, on July 15, 1944, Churchill met with Woodhouse to discuss the problem of EAM-ELAS, which Churchill had decided to denounce, as well as to remove the British Military Missions from Greece, but after speaking with the veteran SOE commander, Churchill agreed to maintain the *status quo*.<sup>74</sup> There is certainly a stark difference between Churchill's reactions and outbursts with respect to the communists and the realities of the war and British policy in the Balkans and Mediterranean. In the same book Stafford underlines this point by quoting Churchill's remarks to Anthony Eden concerning the situation in Yugoslavia: "I have come to the conclusion that in Tito we have nursed a viper...But up until recently he has been biting the Huns. Now that he has started biting us, I feel much less sympathetic."<sup>75</sup> Although in the spring of 1944 Churchill had explained the inconsistency of his policy with respect to supporting communists in Yugoslavia when he asked Fitzroy Maclean: "Do you intend to make Yugoslavia your home after the war?" "No", Maclean replied. "Neither do I," said Churchill, "And that being so, the less you and I worry about the form of government they set up the better...what interests us, is which of them is doing most harm to the Germans."<sup>76</sup> Eventually, Churchill approached the communist threat to Greece by dealing directly with Stalin. In the so-called Percentages Agreement concluded on October 9, 1944, Churchill and the Soviet leader divided the Balkans into Soviet and British zones that gave Britain 90% interest in Greece.<sup>77</sup> Although the agreement remained secret, the British had secured a free hand in post-war Greece and undermined any support that the Greek communists could expect from the Soviet Union.

The end of the German occupation concurrently signaled the termination of SOE's role in Greek affairs. The concept of revolutionary forces and left-wing organizations as the ideal instruments of instigating resistance proved accurate to a degree and vindicated the efforts of the Cairo SOE. The political aftershocks of the Greek resistance were a factor of the post-war political realities that, in December 1944, forced the British army in Greece to intercede in the second Greek civil war and fight the same forces that only a few months earlier were recognized as allied units. The fighting lasted over a month but Churchill was determined to defeat



EAM-ELAS and did not shrink from committing substantial British forces to secure Greece. Stalin for his part adhered to the Percentages Agreement and left the Greek communists to their fate.

Ironically, the only voices of protest came from the United States and from the British Labour Party, Moscow remained essentially mute during the course of the crisis. In the United States, Drew Pearson, the Washington columnist, led the outcry against the British and his articles galvanized support for EAM-ELAS. Churchill attempted to persuade Roosevelt to make a public statement supporting British policy in Greece, but the American president refused. In contrast, at the Yalta conference Churchill expressed his gratitude to Stalin for not making an issue of the December crisis in Greece.<sup>78</sup> On December 8, Churchill faced strong criticism in the House of Commons from Emanuel Shinwell and Aneurin Bevin and was accused of destroying Greek democracy. Churchill, however, never at a loss for coining a phrase, retorted that democracy was "no harlot to be picked up in the street by a man with a Tommy gun."<sup>79</sup> In the same debate Churchill also used the opportunity to sum up Britain's policy towards wartime resistance in Greece and Europe by stating that its objective was "to arm anyone who could shoot a Hun but this did not entitle the guerrillas to install themselves in power in the great capitals of Europe."<sup>80</sup> In effect, Churchill brought the cycle of irregular warfare full circle and negated the political aspirations of the resistance. Regardless of what transpired during the occupation, the role of the resistance, in so far as it concerned British policy, was to fight the Axis and contribute to an allied victory. In this respect, the military clash between the British and EAM-ELAS was almost certainly inevitable. The Greek Left viewed the resistance through a different prism that equated the struggle against the Axis as a mechanism for political change after the war. To a great extent, this was the result of the circumstances in occupied Greece that led to the organization of resistance groups and guerrilla forces whose leaders opposed the pre-war political *status-quo*. Ultimately, the dynamic that worked in favor of British military interests during the German occupation of Greece played havoc with British policy towards Greece immediately after liberation and later dragged the country into a third and final civil war between 1946 and 1949.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.M.A. Gwyer, *Grand Strategy: History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Military Series*, 6 Vols., J.R.M. Butler, ed. (London: H.M.S.O., 1956-1976); Vol. 3 Part I, (London: 1964), 42-44 (hereafter cited as *Grand Strategy*).

<sup>2</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), War Cabinet Memorandum (CAB), 121

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Dalton, *Memoirs: The Fateful Years 1931-1945*, Vol. 2 (London: F. Muller, 1957), 366.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, War Cabinet: Chiefs of Staff of Staff Committee Memoranda (COS), 40, CAB 80/17.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton*, B. Pimlott ed., (London: Cape, 1986), 52.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Wilkinson and Joan B. Astley, *Gubbins and SOE* (London: Leo Cooper, 1993), 80.

<sup>7</sup> "Subversive Activities in Relation to Strategy," COS (40), 27 in CAB 80/56.

<sup>8</sup> J.M.A. Gwyer, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. III, Part I (London: 1964), 48.

<sup>9</sup> War Cabinet: Chiefs of Staff Committee Meetings, CAB, 79/12.

<sup>10</sup> Gwyer, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. 3, 45-48.

<sup>11</sup> The propaganda aspect of subversive operations was shortly transferred to the newly established Political Warfare Executive.

<sup>12</sup> CAB, 79/13.

<sup>13</sup> E.H. Cookridge, *Set Europe Ablaze: The Story of Special Operations in Western Europe 1940-45* (London: Pan Books, 1966), 37.

<sup>14</sup> Gwyer, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. 3, p. 48; Sir Colin Gubbins, "Resistance Movements in the War," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, Vol. 93 (May, 1948), 211.

<sup>15</sup> *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea*, 27 May 1945, 21 (Athens: Benaki Museum).

<sup>16</sup> Andre Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece, 1940-1944*, (New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1992), 132-133.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea*, 27 May 1945, Appendix I, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Secret Intelligence Service is a British espionage agency.

<sup>20</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott, "SOE in the Balkans," in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg, eds. *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1965), 96; C.M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord* (London: Hutchinson and Company Publishers, 1948), 36.



<sup>22</sup> *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea*, 27 May 1945, Appendix II, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Wilkinson and Astley, 91.

<sup>24</sup> These and allegations of wrongdoing and corruption by other officials were dismissed after Frank Nelson, the Executive Director of the SOE, conducted his own investigation in Cairo. However, in the interests of maintaining the confidence of the services in the Middle East, Nelson decided to recall the heads of SO1 and SO2 as well as their immediate subordinates. The reason underlying the accusations and intrigue against the SOE, writes Bickham Sweet-Escott (London, 1965, 74-76), who accompanied Nelson, was that the Middle East sections of the SOE were seen as interlopers "...and being bigger and somewhat less secret than the older secret organizations...provided an easy target for those who wished to make a reputation for integrity and ruthlessness by exposing them, and for empire-builders who saw the chance of creating jobs for themselves by denouncing incompetence...."

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Lyttleton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London: The Bodley Head, 1962), 239.

<sup>26</sup> SO1 and SO2 were the two branches of the SOE. FO 898/9, 53.

<sup>27</sup> Sweet-Escott (London: 1965), 74-76.

<sup>28</sup> FO 898/9, 53.

<sup>29</sup> Sweet-Escott, (London: 1965), 78.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 70; Sweet-Escott, in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> The story of John Atkinson and the Antiparos disaster remains shrouded in mystery with only passing and often misleading references in British accounts, the main elements of the Atkinson mission are found primarily in Greek sources. For a list of Greek and British references to Atkinson, see: Gerolymatos, 223 and note 3. Christina Goulter-Zervoudakis, "The Politicization of Intelligence: The British Experience in Greece, 1941-1944," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 13, Spring 1998, No. 1, 168, cites the Atkinson mission as an example of British intelligence activity in Greece but essentially relies on A. Zaousis, *Dyo Ochtes 1939-1945: Mia Prospathia gia Ethniki Symfiliosi (The Two Banks, 1939-1945: an Attempt at National Reconciliation)*, (Athens: Papazisis, 1987), Part B, (Vol. II), 73. The most reliable source for this episode is provided by Admiral Panagiotis E. Konstas, *I Ellas tis Dekatias 1940-1950, (Greece in the Decade of 1940-1950)*, (Athens: Private Printing, 1955), 244-246, the head of the Greek secret service in Cairo. Konstas' account derives not only from his own recollections of the events but on the transcripts of the post-war trial of the collaborators on the island of Siros. For an analysis of the British and Greek sources of the Atkinson mission see

Gerolymatos, 223, note 3.

<sup>32</sup> Sir John Stevens, "Following Sweet-Escott" in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, 216-217.

<sup>33</sup> Sweet-Escott, (London: 1975), 18.

<sup>34</sup> As explained by George Taylor, virtually all intelligence concerning the political situation in Greece came to the SOE station in Izmir from the Prometheus II network as well as from agents, couriers or escapees, who testified that the monarchy and the Government-in-exile had little support. See George Taylor, "Following Woodhouse, Myers and Clogg" in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance*, 261-262. In the same publication, see "Following Woodhouse, Myers and Clogg", in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance*, 265. Woodhouse comments that most of the SOE agents were republicans and naturally hostile to the Greek monarchy.

<sup>35</sup> Woodhouse's role in the Harling Mission is problematical with respect to the absence of any briefing for the team since Woodhouse was to remain in Greece after the Viaduct was destroyed.

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, "Following Woodhouse, Myers and Clogg" in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance*, 263.

<sup>37</sup> *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea*, Appendix VIII; (G. Ioannidis: Athens, 1979), 124-125 and 513, note 40.

<sup>38</sup> Clogg, "The Special Operations Executive in Greece" in John O. Iatrides, ed. *Greece in the 1940s: A Nation in Crisis* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1981), 113.

<sup>39</sup> Fleischer, *Stema kai Swastika (Crown and Swastika)* [Athens: Papazisis, 1988], Vol. 1, 240-241.

<sup>40</sup> Alexandros Levides, *Gia Chara tis Alithias: Intelligence kai Andistasi, (For the Sake of Truth: Intelligence and Resistance)*, [Athens: Unpublished Manuscript, 1975], 29.

<sup>41</sup> Gerolymatos, 275.

<sup>42</sup> S. Kotsis, *Midas 614* (Athens: Private Publication, 1976) passim. Kotsis was a member of the Tsigantes team and offers a detailed description of their activities in Greece.

<sup>43</sup> Kanellopoulos was forced to leave Greece as a result of the Atkinson debacle and joined the Greek government-in-exile with the encouragement and support of the British. Although he had openly opposed the Metaxas dictatorship, he was acceptable to the Greek king. Kanellopoulos was determined to reorganize the Greek armed forces in the Middle East and coordinate the war effort with the resistance in Greece in cooperation with the British intelligence services (Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, *Imerologio 31 Martiou 1942 - 4 Ianuariou 1945 [Diary: 31 March 1942 - 4 January 1945]*, (Athens: Kedros, 1977), 41; FO 371/37201; Gerolymatos, 264-265 and 434-435.



<sup>44</sup> Gerolymatos, 286.

<sup>45</sup> Kanellopoulos, 436-441.

<sup>46</sup> Ch. Zalokostas, *To Chroniko tis Sklavias* [(The Chronicle of Slavery), Athens: Estia n.d.], 70-73; Th. Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotis tis Ellados: Istorikai Anamneseis Pos Ekerdisame tous Agonas 1940-1949* (40 Years A Soldier for Greece: Historical Memoirs, How We Were Victorious in the Struggles of 1940-1949), 2 Vols. (Athens: Akropoleos, 1960), Vol. A, 372. Kanellopoulos, 436-437. Rather than maintain a low profile, Tsigantes moved openly in Athens and took only rudimentary precautions preferring instead to lead a fairly active social life that was facilitated by the large amount of gold sovereigns he brought with him. January 15, 1943, Tsigantes was betrayed to the Italians by an anonymous woman and shot while trying to escape. A post-war inquiry, according to Fleischer, 304, suggested that he was betrayed by the British intelligence services.

<sup>47</sup> Kanellopoulos, 436-440.

<sup>48</sup> Gerolymatos, 279-280.

<sup>49</sup> Wilkinson and Astley, 132. SOE headquarters in London was commonly referred to as Baker Street.

<sup>50</sup> J.G. Beevor, *SOE: Recollections and Reflections, 1949-1945* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1981), 115.

<sup>51</sup> On different viewpoints concerning Keble see Sweet-Escott, (London: 1965), 170; C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Granada Publishing, 1982), 29; Wilkinson and Astley, 147-148; FO 371/37208, R 11753.

<sup>52</sup> In a paper presented to Winston Churchill when the prime minister was in Cairo in January 1943, Keble also advocated support of Tito's Partisans and sought authorization to send missions in Yugoslavia (FO 371/37579). Churchill approved Keble's recommendations and that along with other factors ultimately led to a reversal in British policy towards Yugoslavia (Beevor, 115-116). See also Elizabeth Barker, "Some Factors in British Decision-Making over Yugoslavia 1941-4" in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, "Following Sweet-Escott," in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, 219.

<sup>54</sup> Mincemeat was the strategic deception organized by the British to convince the Germans that the Allies were preparing to invade Greece in the summer of 1943 instead of Sicily.

<sup>55</sup> Between March and July 1943 the total number of German divisions in the Balkans increased from eight to eighteen and those in Greece from one to eight, F.H. Hinsley, et. al. *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, 4 Vols. (London: H.M.S.O., 1979-1984), Vol. 3, 120 and Michael Howard, *Strategic Deception in the*

*Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 92.

<sup>56</sup> Clogg, "Pearls from Swine," in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg eds., *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), 175. Clogg provides a cogent and thorough analysis of the Foreign Office's policy and attitude with respect to relations with the SOE, as well as towards King George II, the Greek government-in-exile, and the Greek resistance.

<sup>57</sup> E. Myers, *Greek Entanglement* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1985), 250ff.

<sup>58</sup> The six representatives of the resistance organizations demanded that a plebiscite on the Monarchy be held after liberation and before the king would return to Greece and that they be granted immediately three ministerial posts in the government-in-exile (Myers, 248-254).

<sup>59</sup> Beevor, 175.

<sup>60</sup> Clogg, 193, Sweet-Escott (London: 1975), 174-175.

<sup>61</sup> London headquarters regarded the transfer of operational control of SOE Cairo to the Commanders-in-Chief a major threat to the future of the organization in all theaters of war, particularly after the temporary suspension of its operations in Europe as a result of the discovery that the Germans had penetrated the SOE in the Netherlands (Hinsley, Vol. 3, Part 1, 463).

<sup>62</sup> In March 1943, the responsibilities of SOE Cairo were confined to Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. Yugoslavia and Albania were placed under direct military jurisdiction (Special Operations Mediterranean Headquarters which was responsible to the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean). In May 1943, SOE forces in western Europe were brought under Special Force Headquarters which was part of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (Ibid., 463).

<sup>63</sup> *Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea*, Appendix II (A) and 2.

<sup>64</sup> Even prior to the landings in Sicily, the Chiefs of Staff had directed the Commanders-in-Chief Middle East (June 28, 1943) to continue planning for the capture of Rhodes (Operation Accolade); see Howard, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. IV (1972), 383, 411, 416, 428, 487.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1968), 46, argues that Churchill's change in attitude with respect to Overlord was representative of the prime minister's willingness to exploit opportunities and that flexibility was at the essence of his strategic thinking.

<sup>66</sup> On September 8, the Italian garrison surrendered on Castellorizo and between September 8-16, 1943, British forces occupied the Dodecanese islands of Cos, Calymnos, Leros, Samos and other smaller islands without any Italian resistance. The Germans, as intelligence and signit reports



indicated were consolidating their hold over Rhodes (Hinsley, Vol. 3, Part. 1, 119-120).

<sup>67</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill 1941-1945* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Company, 1986), 497. John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy* Vol. 5, Part I (London: HMSO, 1956), 95; Howard (London: 1968), 50-51.

<sup>68</sup> Gilbert, 532-533.

<sup>69</sup> At a meeting of the Commanders-in-Chief in Tunis on October 9, 1943, it was decided that there were not sufficient forces available to attack the Germans at Rhodes (Gilbert, 526). Furthermore, the Germans were able to re-capture the islands of Cos on October 3-4 and Leros on November 16-17. The following day, the British withdrew from the Aegean and evacuated the Samos garrison on the night of November 19-20.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy* (London: HMSO, 1972), Vol. IV, 489-490; J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy* Vol. V, 111.

<sup>71</sup> COS 44, 23, 27, 28; COS 44, 149; CAB 79/1; CAB 80/81. At the Teheran Conference, Churchill explained to Stalin that the objective of the Mediterranean strategy was to relieve the Russian front and support Overlord. To this end, the Yugoslav, Albanian and Greek partisans were tying down 21 German divisions (Gilbert, 564 and 578-579).

<sup>72</sup> David Stafford, *Churchill and Secret Service* (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1997), 266-267.

<sup>73</sup> On August 22, 1943, George II had telegraphed Churchill and Roosevelt during their meeting at the Quebec conference.

<sup>74</sup> Woodhouse, *Something Ventured*, 85, suggests that Churchill abandoned the idea of breaking with EAM-ELAS because of the possibility that an agreement could be reached with Stalin.

<sup>75</sup> Stafford, 302.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>77</sup> In exchange, the Soviets acquired 90% of Romania, while Hungary and Yugoslavia were to be shared evenly and the Russians gained 75% of Bulgaria. In order to allay American fears over the creation of permanent spheres of influence, the Percentages Agreement was to apply only for the duration of the war. See Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), Vol. 6, 196-197; Gilbert, 992-1000.

<sup>78</sup> Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1993), 218 and 234.

<sup>79</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, 8 December 1944, Cols. 929-30.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 8 December 1944, Cols. 929-30.

## The BBC and the Gorgopotamos Sabotage: An Alternative "One-sided Coverage" Thesis

IOLE KOLIA  
DIMITRI PAPAEFSTRATIOU

The purpose of this article is to explore one aspect of the myth that was created in the aftermath of the explosion of the Gorgopotamos bridge in Greece during the Second World War. The bridge was destroyed in 1942 by a team of British saboteurs, parachuted into occupied territory, in cooperation with two, soon-to-be rival, guerrilla bands of the Greek resistance – ELAS (the military arm of EAM) and EDES.<sup>1</sup> The operation was a striking success and was given widespread coverage by the media of the Allied forces:<sup>2</sup> notable among those was the BBC Greek Service. The importance of this operation is difficult to underestimate. Churchill mentions it in his memoirs as one of the two most important acts of sabotage in occupied Europe.<sup>3</sup> Farakos characterizes it as "the first major expression of the united Greek resistance of the Greek people," whilst Borkenau has called it "the most important guerrilla operation in occupied Europe and the entire world."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, heated debates erupted after the operation, certainly the most successful and famed act of resistance in Greece, as to the share of credit that each participant group was given as opposed to that which it was due. As relations between ELAS, on the one hand, and EDES and the British, on the other, progressively worsened, very different versions of the events surrounding the sabotage began to circulate. In the aftermath of the ensuing Civil War, laying