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## KKE Reactions to the Truman Doctrine

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ONE WOULD HARDLY THINK THAT THE REACTION OF THE KKE to the Truman Doctrine, when it was announced in March 1947, could be a problem to the historian. There were so many good reasons to expect what the reactions would be like. Still, the Greek communists did react in a way one would not have easily predicted and which creates a problem for the historian today. This problem might be characterized as similar to the famous mystery of "the dog that did not bark," as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle put it.

Previous studies of the period have not seen the problem in this way, but if we look at just two interpretations, we can see, at least, that scholarship is divided on the point, even though no one, as far as I am aware, has discussed the matter along the lines that can provide a cogent answer. To illustrate existing views, I may quote the following examples.

In his penetrating analysis of KKE history from 1940 to 1949, the German historian, Matthias Esche, writes about reactions in the KKE to the Truman Doctrine:

To the Greek communists, the announcement of the Truman Doctrine came as a shock. They had not expected United States engagement on this scale. Their hope that the Soviet Union would take the place of Britain in the Eastern Mediterranean was not fulfilled. The expectations of success for the communist dual strategy were diminished seriously.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Lawrence Wittner in his *American Intervention in Greece* has this to say about leftist reactions:

Ironically, even EAM, while criticizing "arbitrary American intervention," was not totally hostile to the American initiative. An official delegation from the left-wing coalition told MacVeigh that EAM favored American economic aid but opposed the presence

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<sup>1</sup>Matthias Esche, *Die kommunistische Partei Griechenlands 1941-1949* (Munich-Vienna, 1982), p. 268.



of foreign troops or the imposition of foreign control on Greece; instead, it desired the "neutralization" of the nation under United Nations auspices.<sup>2</sup>

There are several points here that one might comment upon, but the important thing in our present context is that neither of these perceptions can be true. In Esche's case, we may even note that no sources are quoted to support the often found "shock" thesis, while Wittner, as usual, quotes American evidence only, which, in any case, gives a somewhat distorted picture. The EAM reaction in the declaration issued on March 15 was much closer to official KKE standpoints.<sup>3</sup>

My own thesis is that, apart from official and verbal sabre-rattling in *Rizospastis* (which was to be expected), there was almost no reaction from the KKE, and the natural reaction to be expected from a political force already looking forward to — or, at least, regarding as inevitable — a military showdown did not become manifest and cannot even be found in internal KKE documents. This is, as far as I can see, the real problem, and it can only be understood in the context of KKE deliberations and policies during the spring and summer of 1947. The "missing" reaction, perhaps, gives also a clue to KKE perceptions, at the time, of the international aspects and dimensions of the Greek crisis.

We have to take a closer look at the situation of the KKE at the beginning of 1947. Unfortunately, we almost at once encounter a very complicated problem. We know that, at some point during February 1947, the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the KKE decided to change the dual strategy which the KKE had sedulously followed until then and which implied simultaneous mass political work on one hand, and military preparations and development of the partisan army in the mountains on the other. Now, in February 1947, it was decided to focus the major effort upon the military struggle. Since nothing else is known about this decision or its circumstances, we cannot be certain of the motives behind the change of strategy.<sup>4</sup> There do not seem to be any spectacular new facts, either in the Greek or in the international situation known to the KKE, that could have provoked this radical shift of balance, except for one thing: if the KKE knew

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence S. Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949* (New York, 1982), p. 83f.

<sup>3</sup>See the text in *Rizospastis*, March 15, 1947.

<sup>4</sup>I have dealt with these problems in a paper read at the Lehrman Institute conference on the Greek Civil War, Copenhagen 1987 (to be published). See also L. Baerentzen/J. O. Iatrides/Ole L. Smith (eds.), *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War 1945-1949* (Copenhagen, 1987), p. 175. The meeting is not mentioned in the collection of official documents *Επίσημα κείμενα 1945-1949* (Athens, 1987).

that the British were going back on their Greek policy and that a withdrawal was in preparation, the Party might easily have thought that the great moment had come. However, there is absolutely no evidence that the KKE was aware of British intentions. If the Truman administration was shocked at the British determination to get out, the more so the Greek communists who could have had still less idea of British trouble over prolonged engagement in Greek affairs. At least, the KKE cannot have known that the British problems were so acute that they were pulling out of Greece at all costs. Whatever the reasons for the change were, one can say that they were obviously of such a character that they cannot be revealed even today, since no record of the meeting has ever been published. Ever since Zahariadis mentioned the decision in his May 1947 letter to Stalin, nothing has been heard of this meeting or its results. It may be regarded as a ghost, an invention by Zahariadis, since at least one member of the Politbureau has claimed never to have heard of it, but then one must ask why Zahariadis lied to Stalin. The only member of the then Politbureau still alive is Petros Rousos who has never, as far as I know, been approached about the matter, and the only member ever to have been asked about it, Mitsos Partsalidis, denied, in 1980, that such a decision had been taken, and claimed not to have taken part in such a meeting.<sup>5</sup> One may hazard a guess that the decision had something to do with signals from foreign allies of the KKE. This would explain the silence, for there is no conceivable reason why the KKE, to this day, should keep secret a decision based on knowledge that the British were withdrawing economic support and intended to get their troops out, too.

In any case, when the Truman Doctrine was announced, and even when the news of British withdrawal and pressure on the U.S. to take over were disclosed in the Greek press at the beginning of March 1947, the KKE had already taken the fateful decision to change its policy and prepare for full-scale war with a view to liberating Macedonia. The change, of course, was not announced publicly.

On March 2, *Rizospastis* carried the news that Britain was going out and that the United States government had put pressure on the British "to prolong the occupation." Two days later, EAM sent out a proclamation that "a new foreign occupation would provoke the Greek people to a general uprising," and *Rizospastis* reported in hopeful tones about dissension in Congress. Here, it should be pointed out that the KKE did not apparently put much hope in possible opposition within the United States.

<sup>5</sup>See the interview in *Αυγή*, February 24, 1980.



Contrary to what is often claimed, there is no evidence that the KKE relied on internal disagreement in the United States as to the advisability of the United States backing a corrupt and incompetent regime in Athens. On March 7, Soviet comments on Anglo-American plans being a danger to the liberty of Greece were printed in the communist newspaper. The following days the theme was repeated, culminating on March 13 with a report of Truman's message — though characteristically without any comments. The next day, however, Zahariadis wrote an editorial denouncing the American intervention. The week after, *Rizospastis* habitually repeated criticism of American intentions, in violent terms. This was all.<sup>6</sup> In broad lines, this was the public communist reaction in the days following the announcement of the doctrine, emphasizing the will of the KKE and the people's movement to fight U.S. imperialism.

If we then look for less official reactions, there are almost none to be found, at least not in the voluminous material published from the KKE archives by Philip Iliou.<sup>7</sup> The first direct reference to the fact that the American factor now also is to be reckoned with is contained in the secret directive sent to the partisan leader, Markos Vafiadis, on April 17. Here, Zahariadis states that the people's movement has to face the fact that monarchofascism is supported by Anglo-American imperialism, but Zahariadis also emphasizes that "our movement as a part of the . . . world democratic and socialist movement finds important support, both morally and materially, while the disagreements between the imperialists increase."<sup>8</sup> The goal of the enemy is seen as a defensive one only, viz. to keep the Democratic Army away from the big towns in order to confine the partisan movement to the mountains.

The same points are also mentioned in a letter to Tito written on April 22, the day after Zahariadis had had a meeting with the Yugoslav leader. Here, we must presume that Zahariadis repeats in writing the arguments put forward during the meeting — and we must also presume that he met with approval from the Yugoslavs. In the letter, Zahariadis says about the enemy:

In spite of the wholehearted support that monarchofascism receives from Anglo-American imperialism, it could not and cannot suppress and neutralize — as it is shown by the facts — the people's democratic movement, the Democratic Army, and all indications go to show that the basic idea of the enemy is to hold the towns

<sup>6</sup>See also the editorial in the April 1947 issue of *Κομμουνιστική Επιθεώρηση*, pp. 146-52.

<sup>7</sup>Printed in *Αυγή* during December 1979 — January 1980 under the general title 'Ο εμφύλιος πόλεμος στην Ελλάδα.

<sup>8</sup>*Αυγή*, December 11, 1979.

and the main roads of communication in order to keep the Democratic Army isolated in the mountain areas, to keep it shut off from the outside world, and to subvert and disintegrate it gradually.<sup>9</sup>

I readily admit that our evidence may be incomplete. It may be pure accident that nothing is said in the KKE documents for almost two months. Even so, the views put forward here by Zahariadis are almost shockingly naive — at least in hindsight. He does not seem to have realized at all the international repercussions that the U.S. intervention might have; he seems also to believe that the U.S., in backing up the Greek government, will be content with keeping the towns and the lines of communication under control. In other words, he does not seem to have reacted at all to the new situation — nor do the talks with Tito and the Yugoslav leaders seem to have opened up other perspectives. I think it is obvious that we must find another explanation; and it is also clear that Esche's statement that the Truman Doctrine came as a shock to the Greek communists is not true. Neither, I must add, does Wittner's analysis cover the facts, at least as far as we know them. Even allowing for differences between EAM and KKE views, the EAM reaction, as evidenced in what a delegation said to MacVeigh, can hardly be regarded as the whole truth, as indications for the real concerns of the Left — if not corroborated by other Greek sources. One could hardly expect EAM to present MacVeigh with the change in KKE strategy. What EAM told MacVeigh is exactly the same as what was written in *Rizospastis* about the Truman Doctrine. And this was not the core of the matter.

One of the results of Zahariadis' talks in Belgrade was Yugoslav assistance to get him to Moscow where he had highly secret meetings with Stalin and Molotov in May. At these meetings, Zahariadis presented a report to Stalin on the Greek situation, and described the objectives and the policy of the KKE. He also gave an appraisal of the balance of forces, similar to the one he gave to Tito in April:

The interior situation in Greece still presents optimistic prospects, in spite of the help that monarchofascism gets directly from Anglo-American imperialism and indirectly from international reaction (international observers at the election and plebiscite, majority in UNSCOB, etc.). With basically its own forces and the necessary help from all foreign democratic friends, the people's movement in Greece will have the power already in 1947 to deliver decisive blows against monarchofascism and its helpers in the country.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.* December 9, 1979.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* December 13, 1979.



We do not have much contemporary evidence for the reaction of the Soviet government to the views of the KKE. However, the little we do have is telling enough. There is a telegram from Ioannides to the Politbureau in Athens from June 4 in which it is said that "we can be absolutely content with the results of the discussions." That the Soviet answer was positive, in that the KKE could feel confident of Soviet support on the necessary and desired scale, can also be seen from the decisions of the 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee in September 1947, in which the plans for liberation of a large part of northern Greece and an increase in manpower strength of the Democratic Army to 50,000 were officially endorsed. This can only mean that the KKE felt certain that the Soviet Union agreed with the plans and was able and willing to give the necessary material help. We also have lists of urgently wanted material sent to Moscow after the meeting of Zahariadis with Stalin and Molotov. This could have no meaning if the Soviet leaders had reacted negatively to the ideas put forward by Zahariadis. Though we have very little evidence to go upon, I think that we must conclude that the KKE got the green light in May 1947, and had good reasons to think that the CPSU shared its views of the Greek situation. In later years, Zahariadis never, except once, talked about this meeting, not even when he was facing grave charges at the 7th Plenum in 1957 to have started the Civil War almost singlehandedly. Though there were many rumors in circulation, the matter does not seem to have been mentioned until Ahilleas Papaioannou, in his interesting, but somewhat problematic, book, *The Testament of Nikos Zahariadis*, wrote about the talks he had in 1963 with the now dethroned KKE leader. On this occasion, if we can believe Papaioannou, Zahariadis spoke freely about Stalin's promises of airplanes from Poland, heavy artillery from Czechoslovakia and even tanks, and so on. If Stalin's promises were of that order, we can see why the KKE did not take account of American economic intervention. Zahariadis felt safely backed up by Stalin.<sup>11</sup> Whatever we may think of this, there can be no doubt that this is why the KKE leaders did not, after March 1947, change their February decision to regard the armed struggle as the more important sector of activity, and did not readjust military goals. In his series of articles on the KKE documents, Philip Iliou observes that "the new realities that came into being in Greece with the United States intervention . . . did not lead to a change or revision of already taken decisions." He does not, however, draw what I think is the natural conclusion: that the promises from Stalin made the KKE blind to these realities, or made the KKE think that the U.S. aid would be effectively countered by lavish

<sup>11</sup> Αχιλλέας Παπαιωάννου, *Η διαθήκη του Ν. Ζαχαριάδη* (Athens, 1986), p. 49.

Soviet assistance.<sup>12</sup>

If I am right so far, the further question is raised whether the Soviet Union also was blind to these realities. Did Stalin, at that point, under-rate U.S. determination, or did his promises serve other purposes? And why were they never fulfilled in the way expected by the KKE? These questions I do not feel qualified to answer, but I think they should be put.

Whatever the answer may be, the KKE now went ahead into a full-scale war, and though, as we shall see in a moment, the extent of U.S. intervention slowly began to dawn upon the KKE when the Greek-American agreement was signed on 20 June, no readjustments were made in consequence. Serious doubts as to the prospects for the struggle were not to be heard in the time after the 3rd Plenum's far-reaching decisions that made the KKE embark on a fateful course to destruction. It is, therefore, of some interest to note that a far more sober appraisal of the Greek realities was put forward in June in a document sent to Moscow, but its implications were obviously not felt to be of a character to change either Soviet or KKE standpoints. This document is the so-called "General Report of the Central Committee of the KKE to the Central Committee of the CPSU," written by Petros Rousos and dated 17 July 1947.

For the first time, the KKE admits the significance of the U.S. intervention: "After the announcement of American 'assistance' to Greece, and the transferring of control over Greece into the hands of Washington, the general situation in the country has become more acute and worse."<sup>13</sup>

It is also admitted that Greek politics have entered a new phase. The Greek-American agreement of June has given the Americans full control in the economy and politics, and the support from the United States has given new life to monarchofascism, which confidently rejects any proposals for a peaceful solution. The people's movement has no choice but to fight. It is, however, mentioned in hopeful tones that the proposed American economic support will be sufficient to keep Greece alive only (which was also Paul Porter's judgment), and the report discloses no awareness that the American intervention might be of quite different dimensions than the feeble British efforts. Still, the analysis is sober and realistic. Problems are freely admitted, and there are no assertions of the kind found in Zahariadis' letters to Tito and Stalin that the people's movement will prove stronger than monarchofascism and American imperialism. Rousos' report is, as far as we know with the evidence at our disposal now, the only attempt at a realistic appraisal of the situation to be found in KKE documents of the period. Ten days later, on 27 July, a public announcement from the Politbureau

<sup>12</sup> *Αθήνη*, December 16, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



proclaimed that the "strength of the people would bring about the final victory," a theme which the KKE kept on repeating until the end.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, to return to our problem of "the dog that did not bark," i.e., the "missing" reaction from the KKE, I think that the way in which the Greek communists behaved after March 1947 can be used to understand the wider issues of the Greek Civil War. Of course, the missing reaction also implies total ignorance of U.S. determination to keep Greece out of what was perceived by the Truman administration to be Soviet control,<sup>15</sup> an ignorance that can be easily explained, since no one, not even the Greek government, dared to hope that the American intervention was going to be so all-embracing as it actually came to be. What is more important, I think, is that the comparative neglect with which the KKE treated the American factor — apart from propaganda purposes — gives us a clue to KKE hopes and perceptions of the conflict. To put it another way: the KKE must have been deeply convinced that the help from its allies in Eastern Europe would be more than sufficient to counter the Greek government and the American support, and this confidence must surely have been based on tangible promises of aid from, first and foremost, Stalin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union — even though Zahariadis, in his talks with Papaioannou mentioned above, clearly implies that no documentary evidence of these promises exists. Moreover, such promises must have been suggested before the Truman Doctrine was announced, which accounts for changes in party policy in February. Zahariadis' soundings in April and May 1947 have had the purpose of confirming that the attitude of Stalin had not been altered in the meantime after the KKE had taken the decisions. At the mysterious February meeting, the Politbureau must have had solid evidence for the views of their allies, and the Truman Doctrine, on this background, did not impress the KKE leaders or make them readjust their policy. At best, one could say that it probably became necessary to get final corroboration from Belgrade and Moscow that nothing had changed. This, however, is pure speculation since the Truman Doctrine is nowhere mentioned as a serious factor. It is a quite different matter that the KKE later, after the war, with the benefit of hindsight, found that the U.S. intervention had been, perhaps, the decisive factor. It was certainly not seen in that light in 1947.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>*Επίσημα κείμενα* 6, 244. It should be noticed that the anonymous articles by "W" in *Κομμουνιστική Επιθεώρηση* from May and July 1947 on "Problems of the Civil War" never refer to the U.S. aid and the Truman Doctrine.

<sup>15</sup>See the excellent analysis by J. O. Iatrides, *Studies* (above n. 4), pp. 225ff.

<sup>16</sup>We can now expect a substantial contribution to the analysis of Soviet policy towards the KKE in this period from Peter J. Stavrakis. Though he has been kind enough to let me see his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, I have found it best not to comment upon his results which partly differ from mine.

## The Truman Doctrine in Greece: America's Global Strategy and the "New Kind of War"

HOWARD JONES

IN EARLY 1949 THE *NEW YORK TIMES*' VETERAN CORRESPONDENT in Athens, Anne O'Hare McCormick, observed that the Truman Doctrine had involved the United States in "a new kind of war" against communist-led guerrillas in Greece. The conflict was dark and murky, a war in the shadows characterized by enemies difficult to define or even to see, and by a search for victory not measurable in territorial terms or human and material loss. The enemy rarely wore uniforms, often fought with confiscated weapons, usually relied upon non-conventional warfare, and nearly always received supplies and shelter from neighboring communist countries. Battlefronts seldom existed, for the guerrillas preferred the terrorist tactics of raiding, pillaging, sniping, and abducting villagers and townspeople into their small but effective force. Communist propagandists kept the atmosphere tense by attacking America for pursuing imperial interests and opposing the popular will. In the United Nations and other public forums, the United States sought to defend its actions while attributing a large measure of the turmoil in Greece to outside communist forces. Greece, McCormick insisted, was a "preview of the frontless, almost faceless, war of tomorrow — a war of Trojan horses pointing the way for machine guns. The battleline is everywhere and nowhere," for the Kremlin's central directive was "rule or ruin."<sup>1</sup>

The Truman Doctrine has been the subject of debate since its announcement in March 1947. Critics have called it the "first shot of the Cold War" and proof of an "arrogance of power" that helped lead

<sup>1</sup>*New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1948, p. 20; *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 31, Feb. 2, 5, 1949, clippings encl. in Francis F. Lincoln Papers, Truman Library, Independence, MO. Although McCormick was 5'2" tall and sixty-seven years old, she made her way up and down the mountains with the soldiers, visiting outposts, refugees, and prisons. See *Time* (Jan. 10, 1949) 45.