

PSF

Greece; Lincoln MacVeagh

CONTINUED

MR. ~~W~~IR

MR. SUMM~~E~~LIN
(signature)

The White House

PSF; mac veaga folder 1-44

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF PROTOCOL

*file
Confidential*

November 2, 1944.

MEMORANDUM FOR MISS TULLY:

I am transmitting herewith a sealed communication addressed to the President by the American Ambassador near the Government of Greece, which has been received in the Department by diplomatic pouch from the American Embassy at Cairo.

G. T. Summerlin

George T. Summerlin
Chief of Protocol

Enclosure:

Sealed communication.

near the Government of
Greece

Cairo, Egypt,
October 15, 1944

Dear Franklin:

I feel somewhat overdue in writing this, so much has happened since I last wrote, and since my brief talk with you in Washington. But you will understand that I have felt reluctant to bother you at this time, when you must be even more busy than ever, if that is possible, with this campaign on your hands in which the hopes of all of us are so deeply involved.

To my last letter about the Balkans you replied, "What a mess!" As I write now, the Russians have entered Yugoslavia, apparently more as a part of the development of their campaign against Hungary than as a prelude to over-running Yugoslavia, (though that may come later,) and the civil war between Tito's forces and the Serbian irreconcilables under Michailovich seems developing favorably to Tito, who, while accepting such assistance from the British as they have been able to give, is more and more openly turning to Moscow for guidance. It is hard to see what influence in Yugoslavia the British are going to be able to retain when the smoke clears away, if,

with Soviet backing. Furthermore, (which may touch up
as
Westerners even more closely) the establishment of such a
control and southeastern European role as would be,
The President,

The White House

as seems to be the case, they have built up Tito only to have him serve in the end as a Russian tool, and in so doing have favored the Croats, who promptly yielded to Germany at the moment of invasion, and have deserted the Serbs, who did all the fighting at that time. Mr. Churchill, now in Moscow, may agree with Stalin on the composition of a new Yugoslav Government, but it seems certain that such a government will be even further to the left than the present one, and thereafter, if communism makes good its hold in Yugoslavia, Russia need do little more than to stand by and watch the liquidation of the elements in the social structure which are dangerous to her interests. It may be said that the result should be favorable to peace in our time, as enabling the Russians to return their armies to their own country fairly soon, to help in much-needed reconstruction without fear of frontier menace to her way of life; and it would seem that similar results are being sought in other countries, through the clever use of communism as a solvent, all along the critical crescent from Riga to Istanbul. But the experience involved for the small states concerned seems only too likely to be painful in the extreme, and allowing for all differences of geography and national character, we must, I fear, see the future of Yugoslavia somewhat in the light of that of Poland, which is not encouraging to Westerners sympathetic with human suffering. Furthermore, (which may touch our Westerners even more closely!) the establishment of such a central and Southeastern European zone as would be, in

Russian

Russian minds, as friendly to Russia as to other countries, would seem likely, through the probable elimination or suppression of the classes possessed of western trade affiliations, to provide Russia with unparalleled opportunities for commercial expansion; and thus the upshot of the agreement not to establish zones of influence or cordons saintaires along Russia's periphery, may, through the instrumentality of communism, favored by conditions of war-time fatigue and collapse, end in the virtual if not nominal annexation to the Soviet Union of an imperial domain of some hundred million souls.

To turn to Greece, that country is, of course, economically the quite useless vermiform appendix of South Eastern Europe. Our State Department doesn't even regard it as European, and includes it under the Office of the Near East and Africa. The Greeks themselves, when leaving Athens for Baden-Baden or Biarritz, talk of "going to Europe". But it is nevertheless a part of Europe, and its people are definitely European in background and psychology (if not wholly in blood), as I have had occasion to realize forcibly when talking with Greek islanders only a few hours after conversations with Turks in Asia Minor. Greece is now being "liberated" by a few cautious British following up the retreating Germans, and being welcomed by crowds bearing the Red flag. She is not, strictly speaking, on the Russian periphery, and I have no doubt that the realistic Stalin recognizes the realism of Britain's strategic interest in her position in the Aegean Sea.

Nevertheless,

Nevertheless, subversive social forces are continuing to operate powerfully in Greece today, and are receiving the open sympathy of Moscow, if not its active support. I therefore still feel that, however the Russian Government may formally keep hands off, the Greece of the future is going to be very different from the Greece we have known in the past. The social order there has been relatively stable these last hundred years. The great Greek problems of our time have been purely political, revolving almost up to the outbreak of this war around the old issue of royalism vs. Venizelism, which harks back to 1917. All efforts in the 1930's to bring to the polls more vital and immediate questions than this politico-personal cleavage failed dismally. But the war, and to some extent the Metaxist dictatorship which was swept away in it, has now done what aspiring young would-be-statesmen could never do. Greece is now clearly conscious of issues which never troubled King Constantine or Venizelos, and Greek revolutions are likely, from now on, to wear, at least to some degree, a social aspect. This makes the question of the King's return a good deal less vital, except to him and his family, than it would have been in times gone by, when the dynasty was of real influence in the country. Russia, probably playing a deeper game, doesn't seem to care whether he returns or not, and even Britain appears to realize that beneath and behind the window-dressing which he represents, the new growth of class-consciousness and proletarianism has altered the whole aspect of the problem of retaining

British

British control. These forces have already raised their heads openly once, - in the recent Greek mutiny in the Middle East, - and Russia may be well content with the strength they then revealed. Again, she has only to watch while the trends of the time work for her, - while forces which the bolshevik revolution set in motion years ago exploit post-war conditions for the spread of Russian influence. As the Soviet Minister said to me here one day (he was speaking of Egypt, but the parallel is clear), "They are terribly afraid of me here lest I engage in subversive activity. But I intend doing nothing of the sort. I don't have to. Conditions in the country itself will do all that is necessary."

Parenthetically, I realize that Yugoslavia, - and Greece to an even greater extent, - are very small potatoes still in the typical American view of foreign affairs. But I should like to stress once more my belief that eventually what goes on in the Balkans and the Near East generally will have to be recognized as of prime importance to us despite the fact that the countries involved are small and remote. Here both the French Revolution and the Nazi Revolution have made their most dangerous bids to crack England's empire and pick the lock of world dominion. No one can say for certain, of course, that the Empire of the Czars, which has now become the Empire of the Soviets, will make a similar attempt in its turn, but the fact remains that, - as I have presumed to emphasize in my previous letters, - Russian interests are clearly tending to cross with Britain's

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in this region even now. Nor is this all. Evidence is equally plain right here of Britain's inability to defend alone her Empire against powerful pressure under conditions of modern war. I doubt if in any other part of the world it can appear so clearly as here, - along its principal artery, - that, militarily speaking, the British Empire is anachronistic, perfect for the eighteenth century, impossible for the twentieth. Every day brings its evidence of weakness and dispersion, of consequent opportunism, and dependence on America's nucleated strength. No one, I feel, can keep his eyes and ears open here and fail to believe that the future maintenance of the Empire depends on how far England consents to frame her foreign policy in agreement with Washington, and how far we in our turn realize where that Empire, so important to our own security, is most immediately menaced. British fumbling in the Balkans, fears of what may happen in Palestine, uneasiness as to Syria, doubts regarding Turkey, and alarm over growing Soviet interest in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the whole North African coast, together with the fact that it was only through America's productive strength being thrown into the balance that Rommel's threat to this region was defeated, all seem to me to teach the same lesson in their varying degrees.

But let me return to my mittens. I quote below a part of a recent highly recommended report by one of our secret agents of the OSS, which confirms my view of what

existing

existing trends are doing to our traditionally political and ideologically dormant little country of Greece:

"The movement created by EAM can only be regarded as a full-fledged revolution. One cannot conceive the situation otherwise.

"The EAM movement dominates. There can be no question of repressing it. The ideology it represents and the interests connected with it are so vital that a compromise (i.e. with the traditional order) is the most that can be hoped for.

"British political manoeuvring has failed, and it can only be said that the populace will no longer tolerate it. England has lost ground and will not be able to regain it in the future."

It is my belief that the present (Papandreou) Government of Greece, with its social democratic leanings, will attempt to affect such a compromise, - such an accommodation of new wine to old bottles, - as the above report states to be the only hope. But it remains to be seen whether it can do this and survive - or even survive at all, whatever it attempts. As things stand today, immediate developments in Greece can hardly be guessed at, least of all by one outside the country. I hope, however, to be in Athens soon myself, and my next letter may be more definite.

Affectionately yours,

Luich MacVeach

~~Top file~~ PSF: Mac Vaughn folder 1-44
file confidential

December 8, 1944
Athens, Greece.

Dear Franklin:

As I have feared for many months, - it almost happened in Egypt, as you know, - the disciplinary British and the unruly Greeks have at last come to blows. Moreover, in trying to do what they aim to do here, namely, to "keep order" and "protect constitutional government" with the small forces at their disposal, the British would appear to have got a bear by the tail. Fighting has been going on between the British and the guerrillas since early morning the day before yesterday, and the British staff thinks the operation may last a long time. If it does, I very much fear for health conditions, as many of the dead are not being buried, and not only are relief supplies held up, but water-rationing has been abandoned and the Marathon Lake, already dangerously low, may soon be drained. In the higher parts of town there is already no municipal water, for lack of electricity to run the pumps, and the few old wells available are not safe. Meanwhile, areas around and in Athens which were cleared of guerrilla bands yesterday must be cleared again today because of reinfiltration during the night, and snipers are everywhere. Two men of the "loyal" Greek Mountain Brigade, taken by the guerrillas, were recaptured yesterday morning with their eyes gouged out (this is not a rumor, but the statement of a member of the British staff).

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The President,

The White House.

A German named Werner was captured firing a heavy machine gun for the guerrillas, and other Germans, Italians and Bulgars are among the few prisoners taken.

Though German and communist instigation and leadership exist in this affair, however, and though primal and ugly Balkan passions have risen again to the surface here (as witness the eye-gouging), there are other factors which are of greater importance and bode worse for the future. There can be no question that thousands of the ELAS and EAM are genuinely convinced, - misled, if you will, but convinced, - that they are fighting for liberty and independence, like their ancestors, and in this they are fanatical. They believe that Mr. Kapanandreu and the British, who set him up as Prime Minister and are supporting him through thick and thin, even to the point of not letting him resign, intend to force the King back on the people together with the dictatorship for which they hold him personally responsible. Nothing the British say to the contrary in regard to this belief will these "patriots" even take seriously, and unfortunately little that the British actually do belieis it. As Professor Svolos, the head of the EAM, said to me the other day most aptly and moderately, "The British must give the Greeks at least the impression that they are a free people". But this they have not been either deft enough or understanding enough to do, and I greatly fear that the opportunity which their attitude gives the communists (and just now the Germans too) to spread the idea among the Greeks that in opposing the British they are standing for freedom, opens the door to trouble which will not be terminated by "restoring order" or "defending constitutional government", but
will

will last for years, with wide-spread bitterness and enduring disturbance, perhaps affecting British relationships with the peoples of all the Near Eastern countries. It is possible that the present outbreak might have been averted for the time being if Mr. Churchill had let the Government be reformed as suggested by his Ambassador here. Psychologically, a political new deal might have provided a palliative for the moment. But at bottom, the handling of this fanatically freedom-loving country (which has never yet taken dictation quietly) as if it were composed of natives under the British Raj, is what is the trouble, and Mr. Churchill's recent prohibition against the Greeks attempting a political solution at this time, if a blunder, is only the latest of a long line of blunders during the entire course of the present war.

Of course there are suspicions on the other side of the fence here as well. Not only the old royalists, but now also not a few of the old liberals who have vested interests (the intelligentsia are mostly leftists) are quite as convinced as the guerrillas of the correctness of their own point of view; and the rightist view is, of course, that behind the guerrillas' libertarian program lies an intention to impose a communist dictatorship. Many people are now wanting the King back not because they like royalism but because they fear communism. But the truth is that neither pure royalism nor pure communism has many followers in Greece today, while each enjoys accretions of strength, none the less dangerous for being fundamentally fictitious, from suspicions which are rife and growing among democrats with possessions, on the one hand, and among democrats without possessions but hungry,

hungry, homeless and armed on the other. Mr. Svolos sadly commented to me, "At the bottom of the whole thing lies the King question". Dozens of old Athenian friends have similarly told me, "Communism is the fundamental issue". But the Greeks will never be quiet under any dictatorship, or suspicion of dictatorship, from either right or left. Therefore, I feel that a hopeful solution for the present situation must involve removing any such suspicions. There is much talk here of a plebiscite on the régime, which might solve the problem if properly handled. But any settlement here must not only be impartial, but accepted as impartial, if it is to be successful and civil peace ensue. This question of general acceptance is the crux. After what is now taking place, any settlement proposed by a British-installed government would never be accepted as impartial by the other side. Equally, one proposed by EAM, if by peradventure the guerrillas should win the present struggle here in Athens (though I don't see how the British could accept defeat) would never be regarded as impartial by the partisans of the right. Consequently it would seem that a neutral agency is indicated, and I believe that a commission on which British, Russian and American members should all sit, to guarantee impartiality, would do the trick. Let me repeat that fundamentally it is mutual suspicion that is the trouble in Greece today. It has led to the present fighting, and will lead to more, no matter how successful Mr. Churchill's undoubtedly benevolent severity may prove for the time being. Disarm such suspicion on both sides, however, and there is enough soundness left in the Greeks, despite all they have gone through, to warrant some hope that they may settle back to their relatively harmless normal state

of

of political instability with the passage of time, the restoration of communications and the provision of food and shelter. Otherwise, communism will continue to exploit its present marvelous opportunities for still further collapsing the social order and creating a "Greek problem" to plague Britain, and us too in the background, perhaps for many years to come. Of course, I realize that to set up an International Commission is a serious affair, presenting many difficulties. But I give you the suggestion advisedly, believing that the problem to be solved is also serious. If Britain herself could be got to propose it, to save her "face" which is now deeply involved, this might go ^{a-} towards setting her back on a "good wicket", even if it were never actually put into effect, but for success in composing Greek differences it would have to be implemented.

I have talked personally with the British Ambassador along these lines and he said that similar ideas had "come into his mind". He agreed fully as to the fundamental nature of the clash of suspicions here, and that something must be done "after the present battle is over" to disarm these suspicions. He said that he didn't want to see his government "associated with another dictatorship in Greece", and spoke of the possibility of a tripartite Commission of the three great powers to guarantee an equitable settlement of the nation's problems, mentioning the "precedent" of the three "guaranteeing powers" after Greece's war of independence. He said he would communicate these ideas to his Government, but added that he feared to go too far on the matter himself and thought the person most likely to succeed with Mr. Churchill would be you.

I am writing this letter under conditions of some peculiarity. Where I

live

live there is now neither light, water, heat nor telephone, and around the office bullets fly about the streets so that I am forced to keep the staff away from there, except on missions warranting risk to life and limb. However, I would like to add that among the many thousands of telegrams which you received on your re-election, the one from my wife and myself was by no means the least heartfelt. In addition, I should like to tell you that my mother, in New Hampshire, got herself over to the voting place, where her age and illness hardly let her climb the steps, to vote for you. This I mention because I think you appreciate the gallant actions of spirited old ladies.

Affectionately yours,

Lincoln MacVay



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

December 16, 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR MISS TULLY:

I am enclosing herewith a sealed letter addressed to the President by the American Ambassador, Athens, Greece, which has been received in the Department by pouch.

George T. Summerlin

Enclosure:
Sealed letter from
Athens.



PSF: Mac Veagh folder 1-45-

file

Athens, Greece,
January 15, 1945

Dear Franklin:

It is just over a month since I last wrote, though it seems a year. Recent experiences here have been tough for anyone who loves this country and its people and at the same time has an old and deep-rooted affection for our British cousins, but I need not bother you with personal matters. Officially, my path has had to be very straight and narrow to keep this Embassy from becoming involved, and I hope I have got through all right so far. But I know how the locomotive felt in Kipling's story when it "took the eighty foot bridge without a guard-rail like a hunted cat on top of a fence".

You will have appreciated from my previous letters, I am sure, that this affair in Greece is not the simple black and white proposition which so many of our newspaper correspondents represent it to be. Such persons, with little or no background knowledge and pressed for a "story" every day, may perhaps be forgiven for over-simplifying, but in so doing they

inevitably

The President
The White House.

inevitably do poor service to the truth, which lies, as we know, at the bottom and not on the surface of the well. This attempted revolution in Greece represents no clear-cut struggle between liberalism and despotism with England lined up on the side of the latter. It is rather a bastard offshoot of the traditional line of Greek revolutions, composed of social as well as political elements and fathered by international communism on a country economically ruined and politically distraught. The British have only played the part of midwife in this affair. It was not their fault that the child was conceived, but they have certainly lent themselves with astonishing ineptitude to its delivery, and have only themselves to thank if, in trying to retrieve their error by doing away with the child, and thus, as it were, adding murder to abortion, they have effectively stolen the limelight in a case where the chief criminals are obscurer elements in the world's view. The swing to the Left in Greek politics following the Metaxas dictatorship, the exploitation of this by the communists, and the ripe conditions for social revolution created by the German occupation and fostered by German intrigue, are really the mixed elements fundamentally to blame, and this being understood supplies the key to many things which cannot otherwise be accounted for, and which

accordingly

accordingly the correspondents have not stressed, such as the atrocious character of the struggle between Greek and Greek in the recent conflict here, the many liquidations of "enemies of the people", the looting and destruction of private homes, and the taking and maltreatment of rich hostages without discrimination as to age or sex.

Things being as I described them in my last letter, Mr. Churchill apparently did the best thing immediately possible in the circumstances when he came down here and after approving of the Archbishop personally and putting him in charge of a Conference of all parties, which unanimously recommended his appointment as Regent, returned to London to tell the King that he must definitely accept this recommendation and assure his people, without further equivocation, that he would not return until called for. Before leaving Athens, Mr. Churchill confessed to the British Ambassador, who, as you will remember, strongly urged over a year ago in Cairo exactly the same solution which has now been adopted, "You were right"; and this was doubtless very handsome on his part. But unfortunately it was also very late to realize the mistakes which had been made, and "hence all these tears". For though he was correct, - and recent events would prove it if nothing else would, - in explaining to the Commons that a massacre would have occurred in Athens

had

had not the British intervened militarily last month, the fact remains that if the British had taken the political action a year ago which they have taken now, the communist leadership of the National Resistance Movement would never have been able to spread those suspicions which have made so many genuine Greek patriots their collaborators in an armed attempt against the State. Even as late as last Spring, when the mutiny in Cairo showed such unmistakable signs of close affiliation between the republicans and the extreme left, an overt act on the part of the British to remove all possible suspicions that they intended to support the King's return before the plebiscite (and the possible restoration of the fascist dictatorship for which he is so widely held responsible) might have averted bloodshed by giving a government of national unity, such as Mr. Papandreou's Government aspired to be, at least a chance of success. But as no such act ever eventuated, the suspicions which had already been so sedulously sown by the Communists could still be spread and cultivated, and when the charge was put about that the Papandreou Government was merely a blind to conceal the preparation of a rightist coup, this also seemed reasonable to many patriots in the light of what the British did. Actually, the latter insisted, "for military reasons", on the retention in the new Greek National Army of the

carefully

carefully purged royalist Mountain Brigade, and it was on the basis of the resulting wide-spread suspicion that this was to provide the Government with a kind of Pretorian guard that the showdown came.

Now, though the Archbishop has called Greece's best known republican, General Plastiras, to head a non-party Government of apparently serious individuals who aim to effect national unity rather than to represent it, and though an armistice has been signed with the insurgents, who have had to agree to retire from a part of Greece under British military pressure, so much killing and so many related horrors have been perpetrated that new factors have entered into the situation in the form of bitterness and desire for revenge among the Greek factions, and the prospects for the future cannot be considered as other than dubious still. No hostilities have as yet broken out in Salonika but my latest information from that city is to the effect that communist propaganda is now violently attacking the republican Plastiras as a tool of the fascists, while the British may be demanding more concessions of the insurgents than the latter feel justified by the armistice terms. In addition, the British permitted a "victory" demonstration here in Athens yesterday which inevitably took on a conservative and even to some extent a royalist aspect.

aspect. Under such conditions, new hatreds are not likely to die down while old suspicions may well be kept alive, and I fear there may be more serious trouble ahead, particularly in Macedonia but perhaps in other parts of Greece as well. Meanwhile, no industry is working, unemployment is almost universal, the Treasury is without revenue, and though a new national army is in the process of formation this will necessarily take some time and there seems to be some reason to fear that the British may withdraw a large part of their troops and equipment before the "constitutional government" which they have "saved" has sufficient forces of its own to render its safety permanent.

Of course few situations are ever completely hopeless, and on the credit side there are one or two developments here which may be noted too. Thus, while the insurgents here have put up a bitter fight, much if not most of this has been the work of their so-called "urban reserves", - armed civilians of the communist party, released convicts, and other dependable elements in the class struggle, - aided by some reinforcements of banditti from the provinces, flotsam and jetsam of the German occupation, under well-known cut-throat chiefs such as "Ares". (whose picture Life recently reproduced full page in the guise of a hero.) Out of the great body of "regular" guerrillas in the provinces,

provinces, relatively few would appear to have engaged in the battle of Athens, though thousands of them were concentrated a few miles outside the city. This fact perhaps permits of the belief that while the communists have been successful in regimenting republican Greece up to a certain point (and every regular insurgent unit has its political commissar), they have not been quite able to sell their leadership à outrance, and reports of growing defection from the insurgent ranks, now that the battle of Athens has been lost, confirms it. There are also reports that many of the "regular" forces in Athens bitterly opposed the tactics of the communist chiefs in taking civilian hostages. Apparently they were not prepared for the Red revolution which they saw being actually unleashed here, and would take no part in it, so far as was possible for them under the control which their own credulity had fastened on them. Now it may well be that such insurgents as carry on the war from this point will be much fewer in number than the original forces deployed, as well as less abundantly equipped as to arms and munitions, so much of which has fallen into British and government hands. In addition, - and what may be even more important in the long run, - Russia has given no sign of supporting this movement openly, nor can any evidence be found of her doing so secretly. She has just announced the appointment of a new Ambassador to

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the Greek Government.

Taking a long view, - and if I aspired to be a prophet, which I don't, - I might hazard that after British intervention is over, the future will show a gradual reduction of the state of civil war here to one of mountain banditry somewhat resembling that which followed the War of Independence against the Turks, and that the duration of this second phase will depend not only on the wisdom and energy of the Central Government in placating honest patriots in the opposition and combatting recalcitrants, but also, and to a great extent, on the efficiency of the relief and reconstruction efforts undertaken. This latter condition will indeed be of critical importance for the country-wide restoration of law and order, since without the importation and distribution of very substantial amounts of supplies, particularly of food and roofing material, during the next few months, financial stabilization cannot be effected, epidemics will almost certainly occur, and public morale will be even less able than heretofore to resist the crude temptations of anarchy and the misleading propaganda of those who batten on it.

In this connection, it is apparently now felt that, owing to the clash which has occurred between the British and the Greeks, the strictly military phase of allied relief control should be terminated as soon as possible and the UNRRA take over. If and when

when such a change takes place, the leadership of UNRRA will be vested with a truly incalculable influence over the future of this country, and through this country of the whole Near East. Perhaps, therefore, Governor Lehman would be well advised to send here some tried and trusted leader of experience in relief work, possessed not only of the necessary personal prestige and ability to handle a large group of miscellaneous social workers with smoothness and efficiency, but also of the authority to take important decisions locally for the achievement of prompt results. I know the Governor has been worried about the calibre of the directors he has so far been able to get for Cairo and Athens, and certainly, from my observation of the fumbling and lack of discipline which has characterized UNRRA out here to date, the difficulties of the task ahead seem quite obviously beyond the capabilities of these persons. A man like General Haskell, who did such a fine job here for the Red Cross after the Smyrna disaster, might make all the difference between failure and success. The job is a big one and needs a big man to swing it.

Affectionately yours,

Lucian Mac Veagh