

Cold Chills Down My History

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With no celebratory gestures towards claims to Greek exceptionalism, I would like to interrogate the historical and cultural specificities that have simultaneously informed and formed the Greek experience of the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine. Taking as a point of departure two points: 1) the celebration by George W. Bush of the Marshall Plan as a measure that ought to be emulated in Iraq and the Middle East, and 2) Lyndon Johnson's analogy of Vietnam as the "Greece of the '40s" I want to draw our attention to the narrativizations of the effects of the Cold War in the politico-cultural landscape of Greece from the mid-1940s to 2004, starting with the Civil War and ending with the *Revolutionary Organization 17 November*.

First some numbers:

On October 12, 1944 the Germans left Athens and a few days later they crossed the borders and dispersed into the chaos of the collapsing Reich. Greece was left with 250,000 dead from famine, 15,700 dead from the Italian war, 8,000 dead from the week-long German invasion, 3,000 dead from the German bombings, 50,000 dead from Allied bombings, 40,000 dead from the Bulgarian forces, 30,000 dead from German and Italian retaliation to acts of Resistance, 4,000 military deaths abroad, 1,000 dead in the merchant marine, 60,000 disappeared Jews. 34 % of the national wealth had been destroyed; 401, 500 houses were completely destroyed, leaving over 1,000,000 people homeless; 1,770 villages completely burned down; harbors, railway tracks, bridges, steam engines, telephone networks, civil airports completely destroyed; 73 % of the cargo ship tonnage, 94 % of passenger ships, 65 % of private cars, 80 % of public buses and 60 % of trucks; 60 % of the horses, 60 % of

cattle, 80 % of domesticated small animals; 25 % of the forests had been burned and the Greek national product was at 40%. All in a country of less than 8,000,000. 415,300 dead from October 28, 1940 to October 12, 1944¹.

At that point of the departure of the Germans a part of the Greek Resistance forces ELAS (adhering mainly to the Left) arrived and remained stationed at Eleusis, just outside of Athens waiting for the Greek government-in-exile to arrive from Italy after a mutual agreement that the Left would not capture Athens right after the departure of the Germans in exchange for equal representation in the new liberation government. Winston Churchill thought differently and said so. When the government-in-exile arrived back in Greece and a new provisional government was formed in November of 1944 the Left was not part of it. Asking for what had been agreed the Left started applying political pressure until on December 3, 1944 a peaceful demonstration was organized in downtown Athens where 450,000 people asked for equal representation. The government forces, aided by the British army under the leadership of General Ronald MacKenzie Scobie, expecting such a demonstration had stockpiled on arms and opened fired. For twenty seven days Athens was a war zone. On December 6, 1944 the British, along with the Greek police, started rounding up suspects who had participated in the Resistance against the Germans and in the demonstration of December 3/4. They took them to a holding camp at the Athens airport in Hasani (Hellenikon) and on January 5, 1945 shipped them (8,000-15,000 all together)² to the concentration camp El Dab`a in Egypt, where they were kept until June of that year. In

¹ This list is compiled by using information published in Doxiadis, Constantine A.1946. *Ai Thysiai tes Hellados eis ton Defteron Pagkosmion Polemon* (The Sacrifices of Greece in the Second World War). Quadtrilingual edition.. Athens: Society for the Survival of the Greek People; and in Tsoucalas, Constantine. 1969. *The Greek Tragedy*. London: Penguin Books

² The actual number of those arrested and transported is still unclear and disputed even among the deportees. The most accurate estimates are those based on simple arithmetic: there were 500 detainees in each one of the 30 sections of the camp. On the issue of the numbers see Panourgiá, Neni. 2009. *Dangerous Citizens. The Greek Left and the Terror of the State*. New York: Fordham University Press, Ch. 3 "The Battle of Athens" (also at www.dangerouscitizens.columbia.edu)

Athens ELAS was defeated by the British by the last days of the year and in February 1945 came to an agreement whereby its leadership agreed to disarm on the condition that all other military and paramilitary groups would also disarm and that the police force and the reconstituted army would remain the only armed forces in the country. ELAS surrendered (almost) all armament but the right wing paramilitaries surrendered none. A period of White Terror occurred between February 1945 and March 1946 when the Civil War officially started.

Second, two stories. Of ignorance. One sincere and genuine, the other probably conceited.

1) The statue of Truman in Athens

There is a statue of President Harry Truman in Athens, by the Athens Conservatory which was bombed at least five times during the military dictatorship of 1967-1974. Each time the statue would be bombed my parents would say “we’ll lose Takis again.” Takis was a childhood friend of my mother’s who was in one of the resistance groups and who was habitually involved in the bombing of the statue of Truman. The point, however, is that none of us, children, knew what the statue meant or who Truman was other than an American President. And we did not find out anything about it until we were of age to be involved in some form of resistance ourselves, later in the dictatorship, towards its end.

2) George W. Bush: Remarks at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy³

“In Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Governing Council are also working together to build a democracy -- and after three decades of tyranny, this work is not easy. The former dictator ruled by terror and treachery, and left deeply ingrained habits of fear and distrust. Remnants of his regime, joined by foreign

³ George W. Bush, 2003. Remarks at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C. November 6. <http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary>, accessed May 20, 2010.

terrorists, continue their battle against order and against civilization. Our coalition is responding to recent attacks with precision raids, guided by intelligence provided by the Iraqis, themselves. And we're working closely with Iraqi citizens as they prepare a constitution, as they move toward free elections and take increasing responsibility for their own affairs. *As in the defense of Greece in 1947*, and later in the Berlin Airlift, the strength and will of free peoples are now being tested before a watching world. And we will meet this test" (my emphasis).

What was the test that was met then?

According to the figures supplied by Michael McClintock, as of November 1961, starting with an initial allotment in 1947 of \$400.000.000 through the Marshall Plan, Greece was granted \$3.4 billion for post-war reconstruction out of which only 1.2 billion went to economic aid, and the rest was used for military aid and defense support.⁴ James Becket notes about the Truman Doctrine in reference to Greece that "Greece was the first country of the Old World to experience the full impact of *Pax Americana*. Aid and advisors of every kind arrived: agronomists, soldiers, teachers, spies, businessmen, diplomats."⁵

I don't need to mention in this room the fact that the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were announced (even if not initially conceived as such) as a reaction to the Civil War in Greece and included Greece and Turkey as the soft underbelly of the global capitalist ideology. And I don't need to talk in this room about the fact that this is plainly

⁴ Selton, Lt. Col. Robert W. 1966. "The Cradle of US Cold War Strategy." *Military Review*, 68 p. 68; McClintock, Michael. 1992. *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, and Counterterrorism, 1940-1990*. New York: Pantheon. : 466, note 31

⁵ Becket, James. 1970. *Barbarism in Greece: A Young American Lawyer's Inquiry into the Use of Torture in Contemporary Greece, with Case Histories and Documents*. Foreword by Senator Claiborne Pell.. New York: Walker and Company.

articulated in George Kennan's "X-Article," an article that Kennan later lamented as having been misread, misunderstood, and misapplied⁶.

Where did the money go?

The money that was spent for military and security reasons went to the concentration camps of Makronisos, Yaros, and Trikeri, to military tribunals, to election fraud (with living trees and dead people voting). Between 1947 and 1953 (and then 1958, and then 1963) more than 100,000 people (Leftists, Communists, Marxists, 'Fellow Travelers' and even people merely being suspected of being sympathizers) were sent to these camps where they were tortured, and many killed.

What did it produce?

A new understanding of sovereignty. Greece, from its inception in the 1820s and its materialization in the 1830s, had existed with nominal sovereignty. Foreign intervention had shaped the foreign relations of Greece with the neighboring countries and had sustained or thwarted Greek expansionism. Between 1910 and 1941 the Left had been persecuted by the Greek state, with no outside interventions. With the end of the war, first British and then American involvement and intervention was on internal affairs, and specifically on the destruction of the Left. The OSS first and the CIA later set up not only Operation Gladio but a number of other covert operations that created in the country an environment of intense fear resulting from the systematic confinement, exile, torture, disappearances and assassinations of the members of the Left and Fellow Travelers, culminating in the sustained support of the Junta of the Colonels between 1967-1974.

What does this mean for now?

⁶ Kennan, George F. *Memoirs 1925-1950*. New York: Pantheon Books. See Chapters 13 ("The Truman Doctrine"), 14 ("The Marshall Plan") and especially 15 ("The X-Article), pp.: 325-368

None of this would mean much post 1981 (the year of the election of PASOK and Andreas Papandreou to government) or, certainly, 1989, except for the narrative thread that it provided to the *Revolutionary Organization 17 November*, the last one of the urban guerrilla groups of Europe. 17N started operations in 1975, as the trials of the leaders and the main torturers of the Junta were being concluded in Athens, by executing the CIA Station Chief in Athens Richard Welch. And even that would have faded away hadn't it been for the massive forest fires that broke out in Greece in the summer of 2007. Forest fires, where almost anywhere else in the world, are considered the act of nature (or, lately global warming) in Greece are given a particular political weight. They are set (or so the story goes) by land speculators who are largely the equivalent of the German collaborators of the Occupation and the later willing collaborators of the Americans and the Greek torturers. One particularly inventive speculation for the reasons behind the forest fires span the story of the Cold War in a new way: the fires were set by the comrades (or thugs) of Dimitris Koufondinas (one of the main operatives of 17N, now in prison) on the orders of the Americans as a retaliation at the Greco-Russian agreement about the gas pipeline. Cold War discourse all over again⁷.

But, at the end, what the Cold War really produced in Greece was a new historiography: a historiography that became largely a social and cultural history, a history written by the losers, even as History was being written by the victors.

⁷ I have expanded on this argument in Panourgiá 2009, Ch. 8 "Burn, Forest, Burn".