



HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCIL – RESEARCH REPORT II

Greek Civil War (1946-49)

Introduction to the Topic:

The Greek Civil War (1946–1949) was a conflict between the internationally recognized Greek National Army and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). The National Army was supported by the United Kingdom and, subsequently, the United States, while the KKE and its military wing, the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE), received backing from several neighbouring leftist governments. This conflict represented one of the first major proxy wars of the Cold War era, characterized by direct foreign intervention.

The roots of the civil war lie in the political and ideological divisions that emerged during the Axis occupation of Greece (1941–1944). The principal resistance movement, the National Liberation Front (EAM), and its military wing, the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS), were dominated by leftist factions. Their post-liberation ascendancy created tensions with monarchist and anti-communist groups. Following the withdrawal of Axis forces, the arrival of British troops in late 1944 led to violent clashes with EAM/ELAS in Athens, known as the Dekemvriana incidents.

As British capacity to provide military and economic assistance diminished, the United States intervened in 1947 under the Truman Doctrine, committing substantial resources to contain the spread of communism. Although the DSE demonstrated tactical effectiveness in mountainous regions, its fortunes shifted decisively following the 1948 Tito–Stalin split. The KKE leadership's alignment with Stalin prompted Yugoslavia to close its border in July 1949, severely depriving the DSE of supplies and sanctuary.

Subsequently, the Greek National Army, under General Alexandros Papagos and with extensive U.S. support, launched major offensives against the DSE strongholds in the Grammos and Vitsi mountains. The combined impact of this military pressure and the DSE's international isolation proved decisive. The war concluded with a ceasefire declared by the KKE on October 16, 1949.

The conflict resulted in an estimated 80,000 to 158,000 fatalities and the displacement of approximately one million people. Its legacy entrenched deep political polarization in Greece for decades, contributing to the establishment of a dominant right-wing government and, ultimately, a military junta from 1967 to 1974. The nation, left economically devastated, became a recipient of Marshall Plan aid.

In a significant act of historical and political reconciliation, the Greek Parliament formally recognized the conflict as a "civil war" in 1989, thereby initiating a process of national healing.



Background information

The Greek Civil War, which occurred from 1946 to 1949, represented a brutal culmination of longstanding political and social divisions that became increasingly pronounced during the Second World War. Its roots lie not just in the ideological clash between communism and its opposition, but also in a complicated internal history marked by political chaos, social disparities, and foreign involvement. The authoritarian regime of Metaxas that preceded the war (1936-1941) had stifled left-leaning movements, fostering a deep-seated resentment that would rise again powerfully after the occupation by Axis forces.

The occupation by Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria from 1941 to 1944 dismantled the existing state structure, creating a vacuum that the communist-led National Liberation Front, or EAM, along with its military arm, the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS), primarily occupied. As the most prominent and effective resistance group, EAM/ELAS built a substantial administrative and social infrastructure throughout much of the nation, enforcing sweeping reforms and dismantling competing resistance factions. This era generated significant polarization: supporters viewed EAM as a beacon of national freedom and social change, while adversaries—including royalists, conservatives, and centrists—saw it as an attempt at total control.

The immediate aftermath of the war, termed the "White Terror," was characterized by the disintegration of the fragile coalition government and the emergence of the Dekemvriana events in December 1944. Following the German retreat, British troops arrived in Athens to back the newly restored government led by royalists. This was interpreted by EAM/ELAS as an initiative to disarm them and enforce an intolerable political regime, leading to fierce clashes with British forces and government troops in the city. The resulting Varkiza Agreement in February 1945 offered a temporary truce and urged disbandment, but it did not succeed in establishing a stable political framework. Widespread abuses against leftists by right-wing paramilitary groups, in addition to a contentious and manipulated referendum about the return of the monarchy, compelled many ex-EAM members to re-enter underground organizations.

The conflict's concluding and most intense period erupted in 1946, following a disputed electoral boycott staged by the KKE, or Communist Party of Greece. The guerrilla factions reformed as the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) launched a full-scale rebellion against the royalist administration in Athens. The war quickly gained international dimensions within the context of the emerging Cold War. The beleaguered Greek government received essential military and economic support first from Britain and, after 1947, from the U. S. under the Truman Doctrine, which portrayed the conflict as a crucial battle in the fight against Soviet expansion. Conversely, the DSE acquired essential support including logistics, safe havens, and resources from neighboring communist countries: Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria.

Therefore, the Greek Civil War transitioned from an internal battle concerning the political direction of the country into a proxy conflict in which local issues were magnified and significantly influenced by the strategic aims of foreign powers. Its resolution hinged not only on military operations in the northern Greek mountains but also on major transformations within the global communist landscape.



Past UN Actions

The United Nations engaged with the Greek crisis in 1946, as the rising guerrilla warfare and border tensions posed risks to the stability of the region. Prompted by the United States, the matter was officially brought before the UN Security Council in December of that year. The primary accusation from the Greek government was against its communist neighbors to the north—Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia—for allegedly offering aid and refuge to the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) guerrillas, which was seen as a menace to global peace.

In response, the Security Council formed the United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans (UNSCOB) in October 1947. UNSCOB's role was to monitor and report on adherence to Security Council resolutions that demanded an end to foreign support for the guerrillas and the amicable settlement of border conflicts. The Committee utilized investigative teams positioned along Greece's northern borders. Its reports, which were submitted regularly to the General Assembly, consistently validated the assertions made by the Greek government, highlighting ongoing breaches of Greece's borders and affirming the provision of assistance to the guerrilla forces.

The Soviet Union and its allies rejected UNSCOB's conclusions as prejudiced, contending that the issue was purely an internal matter for Greece, and they vetoed any significant measures in the Security Council. As a result, the topic was shifted to the UN General Assembly through the "Uniting for Peace" mechanism. The Assembly repeatedly supported the actions of UNSCOB, condemning the foreign aid being given to the guerrillas and advocating for the establishment of standard diplomatic relations among the involved countries. Although UNSCOB lacked enforcement capabilities, its existence played an essential diplomatic role. It drew international attention to the conflict, provided a legitimate justification for Western intervention according to the Truman Doctrine, and diplomatically isolated the sponsors of the DSE. The Committee continued its work until 1952, concluding that the direct external threat to Greece ended with the conclusion of the civil war and the split between Tito and Stalin.

Focus of the Debate

The discussion should concentrate on the global dimensions of the Greek Civil War as a significant crisis in the Cold War era. The central issue at hand is whether this conflict represents a violation of international peace as outlined in Chapter VII, owing to supposed foreign involvement. Representatives need to focus on clarifying the appropriate function of the UN: should it facilitate an internal political solution or counter external interference? The practicality and goals of a suggested UN initiative—whether it be an observer group, mediation efforts, or imposition of sanctions—will be a critical area of disagreement, effectively examining the cohesion of the Council.

Significant Parties

National Army of Greece (Greek Government): Represented the internationally recognized government and ultimately won the war with Western support.

Communist Party of Greece (KKE): Led the communist movement and aimed to establish a socialist state in Greece.

Democratic Army of Greece (DSE): The military force of the KKE that fought the government, mainly in rural and mountainous areas.

United Kingdom: Initially supported the Greek government militarily and politically after World War II.



United States: Replaced Britain as the main supporter of the Greek government through the Truman Doctrine to contain communism.

Soviet Union (Joseph Stalin): Indirectly influenced the conflict through Cold War politics and relations with other communist states.

Yugoslavia (Josip Tito): Provided crucial support and supply routes to the DSE until the Tito–Stalin split in 1948.

Neighboring Communist States (Albania, Bulgaria): Offered limited assistance and refuge to communist fighters during the war.

Glossary and Key Terms:

UNSCOB (United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans): A UN committee created to monitor tensions in Greece and the Balkans after WWII.

Treaty of Lausanne (1923): Treaty that ended the Greco-Turkish War and set modern Greek–Turkish borders.

Megali Idea: A nationalist goal to unite all ethnic Greeks into one state.

Treaty of Bucharest (1913): Agreement that ended the Second Balkan War and expanded Greek territory.

National Schism: A deep political division in Greece between supporters of the king and Prime Minister Venizelos.

Military Junta (1967–1974): An authoritarian military government that ruled Greece years after the civil war.

Tito–Stalin Split (1948): A political conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union that weakened communist cooperation.

Grammos and Vitsi Mountains: Mountain regions where major battles of the Greek Civil War took place.

National Liberation Front (EAM): A resistance organization formed during Nazi occupation, dominated by communists.

ELAS (Greek People’s Liberation Army): The military wing of EAM that fought against Axis forces and later clashed with the government.

Dekemvriana: Violent clashes in Athens in December 1944 between EAM/ELAS and British-backed government forces.

Truman Doctrine: A U.S. policy introduced in 1947 to provide aid to countries threatened by communism, including Greece.

Marshall Plan: An American program that provided economic aid to rebuild European countries after World War II.



Communist Party of Greece (KKE): A political party that supported communist ideology and led the opposition against the government.

Democratic Army of Greece (DSE): The military wing of the Communist Party of Greece during the civil war.

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