The Military Campaigns of the Axis Against Greece
Greece Observed 1940-1941

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Dedication

If fate means you to lose, give him a good fight anyway.

William McFee

This Thesis is dedicated to Marios, of the younger generation, whose perspicuity of judgement, lucidity of thought and mighty spiritual strength will ensure the safeguarding of Historic values.
Abstract

This thesis covers the Greek entry into the Second World War and the fight of the Greek armed forces against Italy and Germany. It also includes significant material dealing with the pre-World War II Balkan peninsula and the diplomatic relations of Greece with her Balkan neighbours and the Great Powers. The timetable covered begins with the end of the two Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and extends through the German occupation of Athens in April 1941. The scope of the thesis is double: first, to expose in great detail for the first time the Greek diplomatic, strategic and military struggle against Italy and Germany, and second, to shed light on Anglo-Greek political and military cooperation of this time period. Significantly though, an analysis is made, on one of the aspects of the military campaign in Greece - the Greek unauthorized capitulation to the Germans in April 1941 - which is supported by a vast amount of Greek mainly, primary sources and interviews.

The fifty-year rule that applies in Greece for all archives, primary sources and official documents has limited the research of previous writers on the same subject. In the past, similar historical writings on the same issue were based primarily on secondary material or non-Greek primary documents. This thesis however, was undertaken in 1990-1991, after the expiration of the fifty years rule for most official documents and archives in Greece relating to the era of 1940-1941.

Thus for the first time an overabundance of Greek archival material exists, most significantly military, which until now had remained almost hermetically sealed to the public. Additionally, it should be pointed out that the present writer has also discovered material in the British Public Record Office which has only recently been opened, and which had
previously been unavailable to the public, even though Britain does not officially apply a fifty-year rule.
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Maps 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19 were taken from the Greek Army General Staff/Directorate of Military History and the series, *O Ellinikos Stratos ston Defero Pagosmio Polemo*

Maps 10, 11 and 12 were taken from I.S.O. Playfair's book *The Mediterranean and the Middle East vol. II*
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Introduction

This thesis deals with the Greek entry into the Second World War and the events which led Greece into the first year of this gigantic world war struggle. The aim of this introduction is to analyse and explore the chapters of that thesis, so that the reader will have the opportunity to comprehend and evaluate the reasons for which I have selected the following chapters as my intention to discuss, as well as the interelation between the topics themselves, which I will introduce. Since the scope of that thesis will be the Greek response to the World War II and the initial participation of that country in it, it is important to see the causes that had instigated the Greek Government to participate into the Second World War.

Moreover, topics of dispute such as in strategy, diplomacy and the politics of war, between the two Allies, Britain and Greece, during the fighting in Albania against the Italians and later on against the Germans, will be reviewed. Most of all, however, the Allied response to German military intervention in the Balkan peninsula and the Allied fighting in Greece against the new aggressor are of prime importance. Finally, the Greco-British strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the divergence of opinion and goals between the Allies will occupy the last four chapters.

This dissertation has seven chapters which will focus on the Greek point of view regarding the international conflict that started in 1939 with the Italian invasion of Albania, but most of all the Greek decision to participate into the Second World War and the Greco-British military and political alliance. This limited scope of the thesis will make it possible to concentrate on certain key political and military aspects of the era under discussion which have been, and still are, the subject of controversy among historians for more than four decades.
The first chapter will partly deal with the Italian ambitions and demands that were articulated by the Fascist Government of Italy, prior to the Italian attack on Greece in October 1940. In order to examine these Italian demands I will investigate the attitude of Italy and of the Italian Governments towards Greece from 1912 onwards, emphasizing particularly the last year before the Italian war action.

This historical overview will eventually facilitate the reader in grasping the essence of the Italian ambitions prior to the victorious march of Benito Mussolini in Rome and his formation of the Fascist took over in 1923. The reader will thus appreciate that the Italian ultimatum that was handed in by the Minister of Italy in Athens, Count Emmanuele Grazzi to Prime Minister John Metaxas in October 1940, was the culminating point of Italy's long term aspirations for territorial gains and military expansion. Expansion that Italy tried to achieve throughout the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, later on during World War I and the Greek fiasco in Asia Minor in 1922, and which was amplified by Il Duce after he became the Premier of the Italian Government.

The first chapter will outline the objectives of the Italian Government and demonstrate that, although the Italian objectives for the creation of a New Roman Empire and a Mare Nostrum were set long before Mussolini took over, it was the Fascist element that unified and solidified the unanimous effort of Italy's population to expand at the expense of its small and relatively weak neighbouring countries, Albania and Greece. I will also examine, at the same time, the enormous effort made by Italy to curtail, any attempts made by the Greek Governments to enlarge its boundaries during the international conflicts of that general time period.

It was Italy one of the nations that enabled the Turkish regime to reorganise and attack the Greek forces in Asia Minor in 1922, by supplying it with arms and vital
ammunitions. And it was Italy that occupied the Dodecanese in 1912 during the Turkish-Italian war of 1911-1912. Italy annexed the islands by the Treaty of London in 1915. Italy remained active in the region by engineering the creation of the small state of Albania following the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 by which Northern Epirus, a territory inhabited primarily by Greek speaking people and which is geographically the extension of Greece, was incorporated to Albania. However this state did not remain independent for long, quickly becoming the protectorate of Italy through economic and cultural infiltration and later on it became the ally and the operational base of the Italian army against Greece.

What had actually instigated the first war action against the Greek population, was the naval bombardment and the temporary occupation of the Corfu island in 1923. Mussolini orchestrated the murder of General Enrico Tellini and his staff, leading the International Commission responsible for the demarcation of the Greco-Albanian borders, in order to occupy Corfu under the pretext that Greece had planned it. Greece was thus forced to pay the sum of 50,000,000 (£500,000) Italian liras as an indemnity.

Additionally, the chapter will explore the position of Greece in the Balkan peninsula vis-à-vis its relations with France, Germany, and Britain. Throughout this considerable sub-part of the thesis, Greece will also be examined in relation with the Balkan states of Albania, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Bulgaria. From the end of the Asia Minor fiasco through the beginning of the 1930's Greece diminished the political gaps that existed between these Balkan states under the inspiring leadership of its Premier Eleftherios Venizelos and closed camp with these nations through different peace treaties and alliances. Even with its former bitter enemy Turkey, Greece cooperated and allied with, as in the case of the Agreement in 1930, in order to strengthen its weak position in the Mediterranean.
the geo-strategic position of Greece and of the whole Balkan peninsula changed.

Emphasis will also be placed on the era after the establishment of the dictatorial regime of 4th August 1936 led by John Metaxas, focusing on the role of the Metaxas regime in continuing such peace efforts. But apart from inter-Balkan relations, an essential aspect of the international position of Greece was the conditions of cooperation, imposed by the Great Powers of Europe before the outbreak of the World War II and the existence of constant political and military overtures with these countries. We will see the successful attempts of Greece and the other Balkan nations to unite against their common Balkan enemies, Bulgaria and Albania, and curtail the influence of non-Balkan nations in the region. That was partially achieved with the Balkan Pact of 1934, which, however, did not bring universal security to the area, as expected.

The similarities of the Greek Fascist regime with the Fascist regime of Germany and Italy, which had attracted the attention of the Greek Prime Minister, and the result of the German mainly, influence on the Greek counterpart, will be of significance. The leadership of Metaxas had a pin pointing effect on the Greeks, as he was personally dominated by the military dogma and spirit of the enormous German war potential. It must not be forgotten that Metaxas was a true admirer of the German discipline which he tried to apply on Greeks. Greece under the guidance of Metaxas came to the point where it was forced to clash with both the Axis powers of Europe that he esteemed so much. For this reason it is essential that the Greco-British relations will also be reviewed. Britain exerted enormous influence on Greek war planning against a possible Balkan aggressor or in the Eastern Mediterranean in general. The Greek attitude towards Britain in spite of the different political philosophies of the two countries, is significant since it revealed the Greek need
and desire for a military coalition, which Britain tended to consider with reluctance, though she was a key supplier of military equipment to Greece and continued to play the role of a traditionally ally, friend and supporter. (6)

The last part of chapter 1 will deal with the Italian provocations and threats before and after the outbreak of World War II. The curtain will finally rise in 1939, revealing the Italian ambitions for territorial expansion. The abrupt occupation of Albania in April 1939 by the Italian military forces, the overthrow of the legitimate Government of King Zog who found refuge in Greece, the creation of a puppet regime and the influx of Italian troops constituted the first major and dangerous steps of Italy toward conquest in the Mediterranean.

Albania slowly became the largest military installation of Italy in Europe and thousands of men as well as huge amounts of material and equipment arrived for the forthcoming invasion. The Italian troops occupied positions next to the Greek border and provoked caution and fear to the Greek camp. Italy started by claiming that Northern Epirus an area which ethnologically, culturally and religiously belonged to Greece constituted part of Albania and must be given back to it, while Corfu, the Ionian island that was so brutally bombarded and occupied by Mussolini in 1923 in a show off of military might, was being considered as an Italian colony and rumours circulated of an invasion by the Italian forces that were stationed in Albania. (7) The chapter also discusses how the Italian press and the radio launched a propaganda barrage against Greece which alleged the mistreatment of the Albanian minority living in Northern Epirus in the area of Ciamuria. Mussolini argued for the return of that region to Albania, the rectification of the Greco-Albanian borders and the Albanian irredentism. (8)

Throughout the period Mussolini spoke fearlessly of the creation of a Mare Nostrum and of the historical claims of Italy on Greek soil while concurrently accusing the Greek
Government of anti-Italian propaganda. Greece turned to its traditional Allies, Britain and France which assured her of their help in case of a crisis and attempted to mediate with Italy to ease the pressure on Greece. In vain the Allies gave Greece their guarantee that they would intervene militarily, if needed to, in case Greek independence (but not territorial integrity) was threatened. This measure was designed to curtail the Italian anti-Greek spirit, but it failed. From this point onwards the Italian threats increased and were manifested by local military air attacks that the Fascists unleashed against Greece.

Italian aeroplanes daily violated the Greek air space. The outbreak of the Second World War and the entry of Italy on 10th June 1940 justified the military precautions that Greece had taken in order to counteract Italian military actions in the Greco-Albanian borders. Mussolini pressed Greece to repudiate the guarantees given by Britain and France. While Greece remained neutral, Italian violations of the Greek air space continued and attacks against Greek war ships started to take place. Almost every day Italian aircraft from their base in the Dodecanese entered Greek air space and bombed Greek war vessels which they found on their way. These repetitive attacks united the Greek people against the obvious adversary.

But the greatest provocation to Greece prior to the Italian invasion, was the sinking of the light cruiser *Helle* during the religious festival of Virgin Mary on 15th August 1940.(9) The Italian Naval Attaché in Athens naturally claimed that it was a deliberate action perpetrated by the British in order to incriminate the Italians, but from the inquiry made at the time, it was established beyond any doubt that the submarine was Italian.

This chapter thus sets the stage for 28th October 1940 Italian invasion of Greece. In August and September of that year, formal accusations were made by Italy that Greece violated its strict neutrality and allowed British ships to
stay, re-supply and even attack Italian warships from its waters with the full consent and knowledge of the Greek Government. However, after the war, the Italian Minister in Athens categorically declared that Greece had not assisted Britain in any way, prior to the Italian attack on Greece. (10) At those perilous moments for Greece, Metaxas asked the British Minister in Athens, Sir Michael Palairet, whether Greece could expect any assistance from Britain in the event she was attacked by Italy. The reply was a vague one. Britain would aid Greece by knocking Italy out of the war. (11) That was far from enough, however, to ease the Greek anxiety. Early on 28th October the Italian military forces in Albania crossed the Greek frontier.

The second chapter will focus on the Italian preparations of war and the Greek counter-measures prior to the attack, comparing the military preparations of the two camps. Apart from the diplomatic and political events and causes of the Italian invasion on Greece, the reader must have a knowledge of the military planning of both countries prior to the conflict. A parathesis of the colossal and overwhelming strength of the Italian army on the one hand and the meagre resources of the Greek forces on the other, will convince even the most prejudiced reader that there was no hope of substantial resistance by the Greek army.

Not only were the Italian troops far better equipped than the Greek ones, but also the Italian soldiers had an over-abundance of military supplies that the poor Greek forces altogether lacked. Another important fact was that the Italians by the end of October 1940 had in Albania two complete armies consisting of nine fully prepared divisions, including one armoured, with the support of 400 first line aircraft. At the time of the invasion, Greece could only muster not more than two divisions, one brigade and one regiment, all too weak to adequately resist the invading forces.
The Greek Royal Air Force had only 137 aeroplanes mostly out of date and obsolete. A similar comparison between the Greek Royal Navy and the Italian one, is even more acute. The Greek navy possessed only 6 submarines quite old, with very few spares making their life expectancy even less. In comparison, the Italians had the largest submarine fleet in the world, 121 ships. Yet, the Italian submarines proved to be more of a show off than of a real threat. The Greek army lacked anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons and its units had not been trained to fight against tanks that the Italians possessed. Further more, the Italian airforce was so strong and dominant in the air that it should have easily hampered and paralysed the Greek transportation and communications network, and in this way block the Greek mobilisation entirely with grim results for the army as the Greek Commander-in-Chief General Alexander Papagos believed.

The Italian High Command expected that its troops would march unmolested into Greece and occupying first Epirus and the island of Corfu and leaving Salonika and Athens as the ultimate objectives of the Italian thrust. And when the invasion started on the morning of 28th October 1940 even half an hour earlier than the ultimatum declared, the Greek guards knew that the epic fight had commenced. This chapter will clearly elucidate the ill-preparations and comic scenarios of the Italian High Command. Additionally chapter 4 will review the Greek war plan and its shortcomings, the Greek defences and the influence of the weather and the terrain on the initial stages of the campaign. The chapter notes how the Greek war effort was initially materially sustained by the help of the Allies (actually Britain was the only able ally, since France had capitulated). Finally chapter two will cover the first two months of fighting in Albania, the initial Italian defeat, its causes and its repercussions in Albania and Italy; the Greek successful counter-attack and the difficulties
of the Greek army in exploiting to the utmost the Italian withdrawal in the inhospitable Albanian terrain.

Chapter three will have three points. First the German strategy in the Balkans and the decision to invade Greece in order to subdue her. By the end of the year the Greek army is able to demonstrate a huge and humiliating victory against Mussolini who was at a loss. It was precisely such a possible defeat which forced his ally in Berlin to decide to intervene and change the course of the events. The Germans had never approved of the Italian attack on Greece but certainly they did not welcome the passing of the initiative to the Greeks.(15)

On 13th December 1940 Adolf Hitler finalised Operation Marita, the subsequent attack in the Balkans and the ultimate subjugation of Greece. The German High Command clearly saw the steady build-up of British forces in Greece after November 1940 and the danger that this British intervention posed for the German plan for the forthcoming Russian invasion. After all, the Germans could never forget the Allied successful bridgehead in Salonika in 1918 and they envisaged the British forces in Greece as a repetition of the First World War Macedonian front, which defeated their then ally Bulgaria. Germany thus decided to attack the British forces in Greece.(16)

The second point of chapter 3 will be the winter campaign of the Greco-Italian war in Albania and the spring Italian offensive of March 1941 which Greek forces successfully crushed). The Italian primavera (spring) attack proved to be the last unsuccessful Italian effort to defeat Greece without German assistance. However, the winter campaign reached a standstill as the Greek army advance in Albania bogged down without having consolidated Greek gains and destroyed the Italian forces altogether.

The third point of chapter 3 will deal with the unofficial liaisons between Germany and Greece for the termination of the Greco-Italian hostilities and the establishment of peace
in the Balkans. We will also explore the negative British attitude towards this scheme, which would have brought the end of the war in Albania but which would have freed Italian forces for North Africa. Throughout the winter of 1940 and the spring of 1941, until April when the Germans invaded Greece, there was an enormous effort made by German diplomacy to persuade the Greek Premier Metaxas, and after his death, the new Prime Minister Alexander Koryzis - former Minister and governor of the National bank - to negotiate with the Italians and clear the dispute through political and diplomatic channels instead of fighting.

These diplomatic attempts were made by the German legation in Athens and by the German diplomatic missions in Europe, as well as directly to the Greek Minister in Berlin Alexander Rangaves. The answer to all these attempts was almost always the same: that Italy had started the war and, regardless the fact that she was on the defensive side now, she should be the one to commence the peace negotiations and not Greece which apart from the fact that she had been so unjustly invaded, was winning the war. If such an action was ever undertaken by Greece instead of Italy, it would certainly seem as treason to the Greek fighting troops and a rejection of their glorious victories in Albania.

The German representatives warned that if Greece did not find a peaceful solution, it was very probable that Germany would have to intervene and settle the issue with arms.(17) In most of these unofficial cases the Greeks were told that Greece could even keep the territory so far conquered in Albania or exchange it for other territorial gains.(18) In all such futile attempts, Greece replied that it would prefer if Italy had taken the initiative to halt the war and guarantee Greece that it would not threaten in the future its territorial integrity. It was obvious therefore, that Germany had not notified Italy of the proposals made to the Greek side. Otherwise, almost certainly Mussolini would have rejected Germany's overtures.
It is also possible that Hitler preferred at the last minute before the invasion of Russia to deal with the situation in the southeast corner of Europe with diplomatic terms rather than having to invade Greece, something that would force the Soviets to worry about Germany's expansion in the Balkans. Hitler did not want to invade a country which was governed by a pro-German regime with many Fascist elements common to both countries. It clearly assisted Hitler to have in Greece such a pro-German and friendly regime. Secondly, Hitler did not want to open a second front. Mussolini's mistake should not be repeated, if possible.

Hitler hoped that the Balkans would continue to provide to him all the necessary military and industrial output and forces for the great invasion of the Soviet Union. It was better to cooperate with the Balkan countries than to have to face them. This chapter demonstrates the last efforts made by Germany to resolve the dispute peacefully, and possibly drawing Greece into the Axis camp. It failed. The result would be that Greece would have to suffer the same fate as the other democracies of Europe. It had to be invaded in order to be controlled.

Chapter 4 will cover the British potential to assist Greece militarily, the different Allied (British and French) disagreement on their attitudes towards pre-war Greece and the possibility of forming a Balkan bloc against the Axis(19). Additionally, it discusses some of the basic disagreements between the Greeks and the British in relation to the use of the British air assistance in Greece, and the frequent Greek appeals to Britain for additional aid. Chapter 5 is basically a continuation of chapter 4. It deals with the Greco-British talks of 1941 for the dispatch of the British Expeditionary Force in Greece to meet the German menace and the Allied strategic misunderstandings which intensified the Anglo-Greek relations. Accordingly the vain Allied attempts to draw Yugoslavia and/or Turkey into the fight against the Axis will be explored as well as the sudden Yugoslav coup in Belgrade.
in April 1941 which momentarily lifted Allied morale, only to have it smashed later on following the Yugoslav and Allied disagreement and mistrust.

In April 1939, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, following the rapid conquest of Albania by Italy, had guaranteed the independence of Greece in the event that country was invaded by the Italians. Greece had accepted with pleasure the guarantee, knowing that in the event of a war against Greece the British Fleet stationed in Alexandria would safeguard the sea lanes and communications of the Greek waters and would provide vital protection for the merchant navy. The French Premier Edouard Daladier had also given his guarantee for the independence of Greece.

However any more help either from Britain or France would have had to wait and it was not clarified neither the extent of the forthcoming help, nor the kind and the time of its arrival. It was not known whether Britain and France would have the ability to supply Greece with tanks which the Greek army lacked entirely, and aeroplanes, which were desperately needed. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the on-going German victories over Poland, Greece was alarmed because it was obvious that Britain and France would first secure their own survival before they could send any help to Greece.

Unfortunately, the fall of France in June 1940, signified the absence of military support from France. Britain, no matter how hard she was pressed by the Luftwaffe operating over the Isles, despatched to Greece squadrons of the Royal Air Force just a week after the commencement of the hostilities between Greece and Italy. But Britain anyway lay her eyes on retaining the strategically significant island of Crete, and believed that Greece could not offer any substantial resistance for more than two weeks.(20) Thus the whole of the British interest, at the beginning of the Italo-Greek war was directed solemnly towards Crete.
Greece however, managed to annihilate the initial Italian attack and to prove that she was not an easy prey. From that moment, the British strategists attempted to aid Greece in greater numbers, but always without undermining their own front in North Africa. The divergence in opinion, in assisting Greece with an expeditionary force, between the British statesman and the strategists will be revealed. After losing some valuable time in persuading the field commanders about the gains of sending British troops to Greece, to block the German attack, talks between the two Allies commence. Talks, which resulted into a misunderstanding which diverted the Allied forces to two separate fronts. That event brought mutual recriminations and accusations and widened the already existing gap between the two Allies.

At that time, Greece was the only free Ally of Britain that was tying down considerable Italian forces and in the near future, German troops as well. If Britain had offered Greece to the enemy without any contribution from her part, it would surely seem as treason not only to her ally but also to the Commonwealth countries that were fighting on the same side with Britain, and it would have blackened the reputation of the Old Albion in America as well. Britain could not offer to Greece more than two divisions and an armoured brigade, plus some reinforcement in the air.

Clearly, that was not enough to block the way to the German war machine, much less to consider annihilating their drive. All the forces that Archibald Wavell could spare with great difficulty among his meagre resources in North Africa were sent to Greece. It was an uneven battle between the three remaining divisions of the Greek army in Macedonia and the British forces in the River Aliakmon, against a full army of German units stationed in Bulgaria, with reinforcements in neighbouring Bulgaria. In addition, the Italian army had in Albania almost half a million men; to back up both the Axis powers the whole Bulgarian army stood by.
The decision to send a small force of British and Commonwealth forces into Greece was not to be found in the military texts and strategic plans of the war. It was a bold, sudden, political and diplomatic decision to defend the country which by herself resisted to one and shortly to two Great Powers. It was an attempt to spur up the Balkans and unite them against the new German invader. It was an attempt to show that Britain did not let down her Allies, even if the odds were against her. Above all, it was an attempt to shield by all possible means a small undefended country against the mighty of the best war machine at that time in Europe and to honour the British tradition for honesty and dignity.

Britain knew that she was going into a battle with inadequate forces both in numbers and in quality but still united her troops with what the Greek Commander-in-Chief could hastily gather forming a small party of divisions. The Greek army was not in position to annihilate two enemies on two different fronts at the same time. It was an impossible task but this heroic and firm Greek attitude made the world to keep its breath. The last military episode in Greece and in the Balkan peninsula is connected with the German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia. As far as Yugoslavia is concerned German diplomacy in its futile attempt to draw the country into the Tripartite Agreement and the subsequent military thrust into that country will be reviewed in direct relation with the Greek campaign. Also the Yugoslav attitude prior to the German attack in the Balkans and the effect of the change of the government in Belgrade in relation to the strategy of the Allies in Greece, and their dispositions, will be reviewed. Similarly the attitudes of Turkey and Bulgaria in relation to the forthcoming invasion of Greece will be investigated since both these countries were directly related to the Allied attempts to establishing a Balkan bloc and thus influenced the Allied strategic plan and dispositions.
Chapter 6 will deal with the German invasion. Prior to that, a comparison of the adversaries will show the unchallengable power of the German camp. Also the logistics of war, the morphology of the terrain and the difficulties between the Greeks and the British will be surveyed. Similarly the most important air and naval episodes will be reviewed. But the largest part of chapter 6 will be devoted to the battle at the Metaxas Line. The fighting at the Metaxas Line and in Central Macedonia, the initial clashes between the two Allies on the conduct of the military operations, and the mutual Allied mistrust during the fighting, which certainly diminished their military capabilities, are thus the major aspects of chapter 8.

The following chapter 7 continues to follow the German drive into Greece and will mainly cover the battles in Central and Western Macedonia, the forced withdrawal of the Greek army in Albania as a direct consequence of the German advance in Greece, the political crisis in Athens vis-à-vis the German advance, and finally the retreat of the victorious Greek army in Albania with its dramatic end. The British evacuation will also be covered. A part of chapter 7 will cover the advantages and the disadvantages of the premature Greek surrender to the Germans, its consequences for the British units still fighting and above all the aims of the leader of the insubordinate Greek generals who orchestrated that unofficial surrender, Lieutenant-General George Tsolakoglou, as well as his honourable goals, if any; and whether these goals were ever met.

As the Germans steadily annihilated the opposition that the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) tried to mount, the morale of the Greek army in Albania deteriorated drastically. By 20th April when the German army had pushed back the Allies to the Thermopylae line, the Greek army in Albania had decided unilaterally, and without any official order from the Greek High Command, to surrender, even though the British were still fighting. Some justifications, which Lieutenant-General Tsolakoglou gave, for the unauthorized
capitulation of the Epirus Army, were that the Greek forces had no fighting value any more due to their lack of ammunition and supplies, that the morale was at its lowest point due to the German successful advance in Greece, and the numerous desertions which had weakened the units.

Thus on 20th April 1941 the Greek army in Albania ceased to fight. Three days later, under the pressure of Mussolini, Hitler ordered a second capitulation to the Italians as well as the Germans. On 18th of the same month, the Greek Premier Koryzis committed suicide under the extreme stress of a failure to block the Germans and save Greece, while the Greek Commander-in-Chief Alexander Papagos had advised the British to evacuate the country as soon as possible, to end the fruitless fight which was plundering both the countryside, and even more so, the cities and harbours.

The evacuation plans organised by the British in Alexandria succeeded in bringing out of Greece around 50,000 out of 60,000 Allied troops that had initially landed in Greece. The evacuation ended on 1st May 1941 and was carried out under a sky entirely dominated by the enemy air force since the British and Greek planes had been mostly destroyed. It was a new Dunkirk. On 27th April 1941 the Germans entered the capital of Greece and in this way the official German attack on Greece came to a close. The conquest of the Peloponnese followed right away as the Germans hurried into that peninsula in order to block the Allied rescue plans. With the conquest of the Peloponnese and of some islands of the Aegean, the German attack on mainland Greece came to an end.

The Battle of Crete followed on 20th May but it will not be covered.

A final conclusion and remarks on the campaign, its conduct, the British and generally Allied strategy towards Greece and, above all, the ethical framework against the military behind the British decision to aid Greece against all odds, will bring the thesis to a close.
Chapter 1
Greece's relations with the Great Powers and the Balkans 1900-1940

1a) Italian Ambitions and Claims before the First World War

From the turn of century Italian ambitions envisaged territorial gains in the Eastern Mediterranean at the expense mainly of Greece and the Turkish Empire, thus attempting to block Greek irredentism in the lands of the "dying patient" and prevent Greece from expanding geographically, a policy embodying the immediate aims of Italy's potentially expansionistic policy, namely the enlargement of the Italian Kingdom, the establishment of new markets for Italian products and the exercise of Italian influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

It was a policy set to achieve the establishment of the Adriatic balance through which Italy would be able to increase its trade with the countries of North Africa and the Balkan nations and at the same time limit the influence of Austria at the beginning, and later on of Greece, in the Balkan peninsula. (1) The aim was to create a railway line that would start from the Andivari, pass through Dunabe and finally reach Salonika. In this way Italian products and of course political and cultural propaganda would flow directly into the Balkan peninsula. Italy, at a very early stage after Albania's creation in 1912, tried to increase its presence in that country by aiding it economically and culturally, and so to make the newly created state dependent on Italy for its survival and steadily organise it as a satellite state.

In return Italy was granted the right to occupy indefinitely for its own benefit, the spit of land that guards the approaches to the harbour of Valona. (2) Italy could easily see that the Turkish Empire was at its end, and with the pretext that the financial advantages that Italy had managed to acquire through its economic penetration in Tripoli were
in jeopardy due to the Turkish anti-Italian activities in that area, declared war on Turkey in 1911. In that way Italy found the possibility to occupy the Dodecanese in 1912. However the first Balkan War of 1912-1913 provided the best justification the Italian Government wanted, to maintain its own forces on the islands on the pretext that they wished to secure the existence of the Dodecanese, and protect them from any Turkish landing since the islands were very close to the Turkish coasts. Italy managed with the Florence meeting of December 1913 to achieve the restoration of Albania as an "independent country". (3) Albania would also incorporate Northern Epirus too. At the insistence of Italy, the newly restored state of Albania included areas that were inhabited not only by Albanians but also by a Greek population of 240,000 people. By the protocol of Florence Greece was ordered to evacuate the regions given to the new country and to withdraw its troops from the areas of Kimara, Delvino, Argyrokastron, Liaskoviti, Kolonia and Koritsa; otherwise, the islands of the Aegean were not to be given to her. (4) See Maps 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 18, 19

Greece, faced with this obvious blackmail to either abandon the islands of the Aegean or Northern Epirus, and with Italian insistence on increasing her sphere of influence in the Balkans and limiting Greek claims, was forced to adhere to the decision of the Florence meeting. With the coming of the First World War Italian domination in the Dodecanese was strengthened even more, to the point that Italy declared publicly that her troops in the possession of Dodecanese were not going to be withdrawn, as agreed after the end of the Balkan Wars with the Treaty of Lausanne of 1912 between Italy and Turkey. While Turkey had evacuated Libya, Italy had not done the same as required with the Dodecanese and claimed that her troops were to be "ejected only by armed forces, and thus the powers discreetly connived at the continued occupation". (5)
Early in the First World War, in October 1914, the Entente allowed Greece to occupy Northern Epirus. The reason for that occupation, though Greece was neutral, was to secure the Adriatic Sea and of the territory of Albania in an attempt to avoid an Austro-Hungarian attack in the Balkans, and the consequent pressure on the Balkan states (Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania) to join the First World War on the side of the Central Powers. Italy had not agreed to the plan and complained that the country occupying Corfu could not at the same time have the mainland territory opposite. Italy demanded under threat of war that the Greek army should not occupy Valona harbour, which was close to the Adriatic Sea, on the grounds such an action would endanger the freedom of movement of the Italian fleet. Their reason, however, was not the freedom of action of their fleet but their intention to make Albania a protectorate of Italy. While Italy negotiated with Entente for its participation in the First World War, Italian forces with the tolerance of the Entente, invaded the small island of Sasson in December 1914 and later on Valona harbour. Moreover, under the secret Treaty of London in April 1915, Italy managed to gain Valona harbour and its hinterland, while it was agreed that Albania would become an Italian protectorate.

The Dodecanese were to be considered a permanent Italian possession as well. That was the bait for Italy to join the Allied camp. A year later in 1916, the Italian troops stationed in Albania were ordered to advance to the south in Epirus which they occupied, and later to Janina to oust the Greek troops stationed there, with the argument that these troops were likely to cede the territory under their control to Austrian or even Bulgarian soldiers. At the same time Italian forces landed in Corfu for the first time and only
after strenuous attempts of the Greek Premier Venizelos were the Italians compelled to abandon the island in September 1917.(7) The Italians took advantage of the internal situation in Greece, with two independent governments, the one in Athens and the other in Salonika and the National Schism between the Venizelists and the Royalists, but most of all of the fear that King Constantine I was so pro-German that he would surely surrender his country to the Central Powers.(8)

Although Italy had joined the war in May 1915 against Austria-Hungary on the side of the Entente, it was in April 1917 that through the Treaty of Saint-Jean de Maurienne, between Italy, France and Britain, Italian influence in Asia Minor including Smyrna, Adalia and Ikonio was proclaimed. Recognition was therefore given to Italian aspirations to the possession of territory in the interior of Turkey including areas inhabited by Greek speaking population in its majority. It was an attempt to maximize the Italian expansion that would include an area which was to be claimed by the Greek Government as a territorial gain for the participation of Greece in the First World War. Instead, this area had been previously promised to Greece by the Entente, and the offer had been made to Athens by the British Government.(9)

"Italy had a mortal hate toward Venizelos because he was the only one that could create a Greater Greece against a greater Italy." That phrase belongs to the French General Sarrail who was to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces in Salonika in 1915.(10) It is true that Rome visualised a great chance through the Greek Schism, to achieve its expansionistic policy in the Ionian Sea and the Aegean. A Greece united under Venizelos and mobilised on the side of the Allies was a very disappointing situation which Italy did not want to see. That is why according to General Sarrail, the Italian Government disapproved of the French plan to force the Greek King to abdicate. If the King remained, so would the Schism and Venizelos would never
have the chance to unite Greece under his inspiring leadership. (11)

But one of the most striking phenomena of the anti-Greek policy which Italy maintained in an attempt to block the aspirations of Venizelos to acquire part of Albania and Asia Minor during the Peace Conference after the First World War, was the Venizelos-Tittoni Agreement of July 1919 and its denunciation. According to this agreement between Italy and Greece, Italy would acquire the harbour of Valona in Albania with the support of Greece while the sea lanes of Corfu would be neutralised and the mountainous zone near the coast of Albania would be demilitarised. In return, Greece would acquire the Dodecanese except Rhodes, and with the support of Italy, Greece would annex Northern Epirus. (12)

It was not however to be like that. The Italian Government understood that by the Venizelos-Tittoni Agreement, Italy was losing the possibility of enlarging the state of Albania, which was under her influence, being an Italian satellite. While the possession of the Dodecanese which were to be given to Greece was of immense interest to Italy, since they would increase the Greek Kingdom and thus diminish the Italian influence in the Aegean and Asia Minor. (13) The Venizelos-Tittoni Agreement was rejected under the pretext that the Italian occupation of Albania was not peaceful, since the Albanians resisted the Italian occupation forces in the area of Valona that was to be under Italian rule. The decision of the Great Powers, other than Italy, to allow Greek forces to land in Asia Minor and safeguard, from the Turkish Nationalist under Kemal, the Christian population living in the region, changed the scope of the agreement. As a result of the rejection, Italy maintained the right to hold the Dodecanese and was against the annexation of Northern Epirus by Greece.

Moreover, Italian dissatisfaction was demonstrated when in the absence of an Italian representative Lloyd George proposed the occupation of Smyrna by Greek troops. Italian
forces on the excuse of imposing the will of the Great Powers on Turkey, and with their faint consent since Turkey was one of the losers of the Great War, occupied the Adalia area in March 1919. But their reasons for that occupation were not just to aid the Allied cause by enforcing the decisions of the Great Powers; but an attempt to block the way of the Greek advance in Asia Minor by indirect means. With the Treaty of Sevres in August 1920, Venizelos' design was to become reality even if only temporarily. Greece was to occupy the strategic islands of Imbros and Tenedos and the territory of Smyrna while with the Treaty of Neuilly of November 1919 Greece had received Western Thrace from Bulgaria.

In accordance with the Treaty of Sevres, a separate Italian-Greek Agreement was concluded on 10th August 1920 according which, Italy would withdraw all its claims with respect to the islands of the Aegean under its control, apart from Rhodes. There a plebiscite after fifteen years would decide forever the fortune of this specific island. However this agreement also contained the provision that Italy would hand over Rhodes to Greece after the plebiscite only if Britain had agreed to cede Cyprus to Greece as well. This made it more difficult for Greece to acquire Rhodes, since its acquisition would depend primarily on Great Britain allowing Cyprus to join Greece, something which Britain would not do.

1c) Italian Hostility Increases

Italian hostility towards Greece was not always overt but many times it presented itself in a more clandestine nature. For example, the Italians tried to fool the Greeks and their "philhellenic" friend in London, Prime Minister Lloyd George. In a successful attempt to do so, the Italians poured into the island of Rhodes Turkish immigrants (who were easier to persuade than Italians) and in this way they hoped to dilute
the Greek character of Rhodes. (17) With the approval of the Great Powers the Greek forces advanced into Asia Minor, into the interior of Turkey, in a vain struggle to implement the Treaty of Sevres that was not ratified by the Turks. The Italian Government quickly realised that if the Greeks managed to proceed successfully against the Turks and possibly capture their leader, then the provisional occupation of Adalia by Italian troops under the pretext of assisting the Greeks in their role and enforcing upon the Turks the will of the Great Powers, as embodied in the Treaty of Sevres, was at a great risk.

This time Italian action against the Greece consisted in coming to terms with the Government in Ankara and supplying Turkey with arms and equipment. As a result of this agreement signed on 13th March 1921, the Italian representative Count Sforza declared that Italy would do everything possible to support Turkey to regain control of Smyrna and the Italians supplied them with all their material in Adalia. (18)

Following this Turco-Italian Accord, there was a French convention on 20th October 1921 with which the French agreed to supply Kemal with arms. Thus, the maintenance of the Greek army in Asia Minor was becoming difficult. Great Britain assisted Greece diplomatically and politically only. The Treaty of Lausanne in November 1923 was the epilogue to a well performed Italian attempt to block by all means the possibility of expansion given to the Greek Kingdom in Asia Minor. And it was at this time also after the Greek fiasco in Asia Minor, that Italy and its leader Mussolini decided to regard as a dead letter the Italo-Greek accord of 10th August 1920 concerning the Dodecanese.

Following the defeat and the expulsion of the Greek army in Asia Minor, with the subsequent slaughter of the civilian population of Smyrna and its hinterland, Italy declared that her intentions were to keep her forces in the Dodecanese, so as to exclude the extension of the Turkish atrocities against
the population of these islands, and of a Turkish invasion. Italy managed to force Turkey to renounce any claim on the Dodecanese by Article 15 of the Treaty of Lausanne, which greatly facilitated the continued occupation of the islands by Italy. Italy, by holding the Dodecanese, was hoping to annex them officially to the Italian crown and possibly use them as a stepping stone to the enlargement of its possessions in the Aegean.

1d) The Italian Fascists in Power

With the rise of the Fascists and of Mussolini to power in 1922, the object of the Italian Government was clearly the expansion of Italian territory and the acquisition of new land. Greece was exhausted from its almost continuous military mobilisation since 1911. It was Greece moreover that was standing between Italy and her demands in the Eastern Mediterranean including the possession of Crete and of the islands of the Aegean which were of strategic importance to Italy.

Italy dreamed of the creation of the Mare Nostrum that would re-establish the old Roman Empire. In this context, Italy hoped for a bigger Albania. The delimitation of the Greco-Albanian frontier had not taken place yet and an International Commission composed of representatives of France, Great Britain, Italy, Greece, Albania and Serbia was to decide upon this matter. While monitoring Albanian territory close to the Greek posts, the president of the Commission General Tellini was brutally murdered with four members of his staff in August 1923. It was instantly announced by Italy that Greece was to blame for that attack; and subsequently Greece was ordered by Italy to pay a huge amount as reparations to Italy (50,000,000 Italian lire) equivalent to £500,000 sterling. An ultimatum was sent to Greece that a full inquiry should take place concerning the
murder, that capital punishment was to be the penalty for those found guilty, and that full and official apologies were to be made to Italy.(19)

Greece, denied that the act had been committed by Greeks and decided not to pay the indemnity to the Italian authorities but to allow an official enquiry to be made on the spot in the presence of an Italian officer. As a result of that defiance to a Great Power by Greece, Mussolini decided to occupy the island of Corfu. It was however no coincidence that a large naval armada was assembled in Southern Italy with a large expeditionary force in no time to undertake the operation.(20) More than 200,000 troops had been concentrated for that single operation with the support of more than 20 ships, including five Dreadnought battleships. It would have been impossible to assemble such a massive force of men and ships so quickly for such an operation, if that force had not been given the green light a long time before. The actual truth is that the attack on Corfu had been prepared in every possible detail - in sharp contrast with the attack on Greece in October 1940 - while it was proven later on that the murder of General Tellini was itself planned by the Fascist Government of Mussolini.(21)

Tellini was not only very difficult to work with, but was also an anti-Fascist who disliked Mussolini's objectives. His murder removed another enemy of Fascism. But, most of all, the murder of the president of the International Commission was used as an excuse for the Italians to attack Corfu, occupy it, and annex it to the Italian crown.(22) After the occupation of Corfu, the Italian state declared that it was only temporary but that unless Greece found the culprits of that murderous incident by 27th September 1923, Italy would maintain its hold on the island.

Since the crime had been committed on the orders of Mussolini the culprits could not be found so quickly - if at all. That last demand was made by Italy in an attempt to hold onto this valuable possession. While the number of the
troops on the island on 27th August was seven thousand men. It grew rapidly to eighteen thousand a few days later. Twenty Italian aeroplanes were in Corfu and construction of fortresses, placing of machine-guns and the introduction of Italian postage showed that what Mussolini said about temporary occupation was not actually true. (23)

The plain truth behind this obvious show of force by Italy is that the crime committed was the pretext that Italy had been waiting for to start an operation, not just against Corfu but against the whole of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean aiming at the conquest of new territory. Mussolini was aware that Greece was extremely weak due to the Asia Minor catastrophe and knew that Greece would not be able to put up a serious fight; perhaps it would have given him one more pretext (attacking the Italian forces on the island or trying to expel them by force) to proceed with the occupation of the rest of Greece. Mussolini proceeded on an assumption of the friction between Great Britain and France and hoped that he would have the latter on his side. (24)

Once the Corfu incident had taken place, the Greek Government appealed to the League of Nations which offered its mediation on 8th September 1923. It was decided that Greece should pay an indemnity to Italy of an amount decided by the Permanent Court of International Justice and in this connection Greece had to make a deposit of 50,000,000 Italian lire. Also a Commission was set up with representatives from Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan which was to supervise an inquiry made into the murder of the Italian general. Mussolini decided to order the evacuation of Corfu by Italian forces on 23rd September 1923. The actual reason behind that move, was Britain's ultimatum to Mussolini threatening to attack the Italian forces on the island, unless they were removed at once. Mussolini declared to his Foreign Affairs Minister and son-in-law Count Galeazzo
Ciano in 1940, that he had not forgotten the 1923 issue and that he had an open account to settle with the Greeks.

Following the Greek defeat in Asia Minor and during the era of Mussolini, prior to the World War II Italian foreign policy towards Greece was a policy of ambiguity. On the one hand Mussolini would not forget the Corfu affair and insisted on increasing his influence in Albania against Greece, while he adopted a severe method of anti-Hellenization of the Dodecanese. On the other hand, he tried to come to terms with the Greek Government led by Venizelos. Mussolini was trying hard to balance and replace the influence of Great Britain in Albania and of France and Germany in Yugoslavia. He hoped he could create a group of client states that would look exclusively to Rome for their survival. In this way he attempted to transform the Balkan peninsula into an Italian sphere of influence for her political and economic expansion.

Venizelos was trying in the Greek interest to ease the tension that existed among the Balkan states. Greece after the loss of Smyrna had to take into account its economic condition caused by defeat, its catastrophic financial position as a result of the continuous war costs since 1911, the political fragmentation at home and the irredentistic tendencies among the Balkan states on its frontier. Thus the Pact of Friendship, Conciliation and Judicial Settlement with Italy on 23rd September 1928 was a diplomatic achievement which brought temporary respite at a time when France was growing nervous about Italian intentions and Italian relations with Yugoslavia were strained.

Rome was attempting to bridge the gap between Turkey and Greece and in return it was agreed that the rivalry between the two countries over the Dodecanese would be forgotten for the time being. Venizelos declared that there was no Dodecanese issue between Greece and Italy but only between the Italians and the Dodecanesians themselves. Venizelos accepted the risk of omitting from that Italo-Greek
treaty any provisions for the Dodecanese for he honestly believed that by bringing the two nations closer the treaty would help improve conditions of life in the islands under Italian occupation. Rome tried to restore the friendship of Greece and Turkey in order to increase its influence in the Balkans. That was achieved to the frustration of Great Britain which however preferred to see an Italian intrusion in the Eastern Mediterranean than a Russian one. (28)

Greece concluded several Balkan treaties which will be reviewed later on. However it is important to note that Greece abstained in the context of those Balkan agreements, from any hostile move towards Italy to jeopardise the recent Italo-Greek Pact of 1928. The Italian Minister to Athens, Count Emmanuele Grazzi, stated that if there was one man in Greece that loved and admired Italy, it was definitely General John Metaxas, the Greek Premier who led the country from August 1936 until January 1941. He had lived in Italy, and primarily in Siena while in exile and liked to be compared to Mussolini, even claiming to be be his pupil. (29)

On the other hand, notwithstanding the Italo-Greek non-aggression pact, Italy proved to have an even stronger and more zealous need to maximize its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, even to the point of action to de-Hellenise the population living in the Aegean islands under Italian occupation. According to Denis Mack Smith, the inhabitants of the Dodecanese were expropriated and their children brutally expelled from the Greek schools. The Greek language was prohibited in the schools altogether and the Greek flag was not allowed to be hoisted; any combination of the colours of the Greek flag, white and blue, was forbidden. The antiquities of the islands were transported to Rome. (30) See Maps 10, 12

The Italian Fascists used castor oil, beating, and torture to force the people to become Catholics. The Italian occupation authorities induced the Greeks to emigrate, and therefore aiming to latinizing the islands quicker and easier. (31) But Mussolini himself disliked the Greeks after the Corfu incident
and the forced evacuation that he had had to order due to the British demand. (32)

However, it is undoubtedly proven that de Vecchi increased the anti-Hellenic spirit already present in Italy. On the islands under his command there was no respite in the terrorization of the Greek population on his personal instructions. (33) So much for the promise given by the Italians to the islanders in 1912 when they first landed on the islands that they would respect local rights of autonomy and that their occupation would only be temporary, just until the end of the Turkish-Italian War.

Italy made successful attempts to infiltrate the Albania so as to prepare it as a base for Italy’s future planned expansion. In this way Albania was made to depend more and more on Italy for its survival and in return it allowed Italy to dominate its trade and commerce. But the most serious benefit for Italy was the ability to influence its political and military climate. Slowly Albania was to be transformed into a large military base for attacking Greece. King Zog I of the Albanians was unfortunately unable to pull Albania away from Italy since he himself was proclaimed King with Italian patronage and thus became the puppet of Italian policy.

The economy of the state was so weak that he had to turn to seek foreign finance and Fascist Italy became the banker of Albania. Over the next few years Italian financing and business interests increased in Albania. From 1935 onwards, all major economic indices showed some substantial improvement but this was due to Italian loans with which Italy dominated Albania’s economy. (34)

Italian penetration intensified and Italian advisers and administrators were positioned in the Albanian Government and army, while Italy maintained the right to use the harbour of Valona for its navy. On 27th November 1926 Albania and Italy came closer through the Treaty of Tirana by which Albania’s territory and its political regime were
guaranteed, while a year later a defence alliance between the two nations was signed with a twenty years duration. The transformation of Albania into a military base for further operations in the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean was achieved in following Italy's directives. Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, said in August 1937 that Italy must create in Albania strong centres of Italian interests and that she must be ready to take advantage of the opportunities which might arise for expanding her policy. (35)

In September 1935 Italy invaded Abyssinia and annexed it to the Italian Crown. However, as will be shown in a future chapter, Italian decisions for the revival of the (Neo) Roman Empire were to take shape in the form of the conquest of the Albania in April 1939, in the entry of Italy into the Second World War on 10th June 1940 and finally in the attack on Greece in October of the same year. It was proven therefore that the Italian invasion on Greece was the culminating point of a carefully planned expansionistic policy in the Balkan peninsula and in the Eastern Mediterranean generally, which had been going on since the early years of the century and was to reach its peak during the Second World War.
Starting our analysis in the early years of the century, the first thing we must emphasize, is the predominant position of Turkey in the Balkans and her control of the disputed area of Macedonia. The Greek Kingdom was very small indeed, and Eleftherios Venizelos, the Greek Premier, was urgently trying to expand its boundaries by promoting the Greek irredentism for Macedonia, Epirus, Asia Minor and Crete.

Greek irredentism was one of the reasons for Venizelos to seek an alliance with a Great Power, since he was afraid of the expansionistic tendencies of the neighbours of Greece. He was especially inclined to do so after the Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty of March 1912, which was potentially dangerous for Greece since that treaty provided that after a successful war of Serbia and Bulgaria against Turkey, Greek territory under Turkish occupation, might be partitioned among these two victors. (36) The Greco-Bulgarian Pact of 29th May 1912 had a solemn defensive purpose against Turkey and it undermined the existing coalition of Serbia and Bulgaria. Through this Greco-Bulgarian agreement one of the dangers threatening Greece, namely the Turkish Empire, was temporarily at least set aside.

However the treaty was a very precarious one. It omitted, for instance, any discussion of the territorial disputes between the two countries and of the distribution of the spoils in case of any Greco-Bulgaro-Turkish war. (37) The Greek state had also entered into agreements with both Serbia and Montenegro and in this way the Balkan states were linked together against the Turkish Empire, the common enemy at the time.

The Great Powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Austro-Hungary, Russia and Italy) were against the alteration of the status quo in the Balkan peninsula and were afraid of an attempt of the Balkan states to expand by acquiring territory from Turkey by the use of force. On 5th October 1912 the
Great Powers informed all the Balkan nations that they would not accept any transformation of the existing situation in the Balkans, which would have ultimately led to the dismembering of the Turkish Empire. But separately each Power was trying to safeguard its own interests. Germany tried to appear as the protector of Turkey; Britain wanted to maintain the integrity of the Turkish Empire through the Young Turks' coup; and France being a large investor of capital in the Balkan peninsula, as well as in Asiatic Turkey, did not want a useless military action that would have endangered her economic advantages. (38)

Once Britain understood that the status quo in the Balkans would ultimately change due to the dissolution of the Turkish Empire, she tried to assist Greece and Serbia throughout the two Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, in order to replace the dying Turkish Empire with these two nations, while France was hoping to maintain the Balkan bloc intact in an attempt to check the infiltration of Russia, through Rumania and Bulgaria, and of Germany in this field of influences. Germany had abstained from close relations directly with the Balkan peninsula. One reason was that she was rather far away to dominate the area and, without the presence of a strong fleet like England and France, she was unable to support a powerful position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Another reason was that Germany's interests were served at the time, through the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was closer to the peninsula and had a personal interest in expanding in the Adriatic while curtailing, at the same time, any Italian and Serbian penetration on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. That Germany stayed away from any real political, diplomatic or military relationship with Greece in particular, was due to the Greek King George I who was, according to the German diplomatic mission in Athens, pro-Entente. The German Emperor did not want to commit himself to supporting Greece's acquisition of Crete because he could clearly see the Greek Premier Venizelos as
the follower of a pro-British policy. (39) Greece would have become, along with Serbia, the big winner of the two Balkan Wars, but the gains of Greece were temporarily blocked by the British and the French. Both these states at first refused to allow Greece sovereignty over the islands of the Northern and Eastern Aegean and when they consented to it, the Turks did not recognise that action. (40) See Maps 10,11,12,18,19

Bulgaria was increasingly upset due to the loss of Salonika to the Greeks and of Macedonia to both Greece and Serbia. It declared war on its two previous allies but soon found herself surrounded when Rumania and Turkey also took part in the conflict. Thus, Bulgaria was forced to capitulate. However, the permanent loss of Macedonia to Greece and Serbia and of Dobrudja to Rumania as the result of the Treaty of Bucharest in August 1913, was a bitter disappointment to Bulgaria, which she would not easily forget and for which she would fight on the German side in both World Wars. (41)

The result of the Treaty of Bucharest, which was in favour of Greece, was the culminating effort of the Kaiser who, as brother of the Crown Princess of Greece, Sophia, hoped to create a pro-German united front consisting of Turkey, Rumania, Greece and Serbia. Of the other two Great Powers, France was openly pro-Greek, but Britain, at the beginning was reserved from taking the Greek side, but ultimately supported the Greek cause in an attempt to curtail the power of Russophile, Bulgaria. (42) Bulgaria had lost territory for its hasty move against the Balkan allies. Greece had contacted Serbia, concluding a timely peace treaty on 1st June 1913, which was the right course for both nations since they foresaw that the future aim of Bulgaria would be to acquire territorial benefits at the expense of them both.

When the First World War broke out, Greece maintained its neutrality, although Venizelos would have preferred to place Greece side by side with the Entente, believing that the Entente would win the war due to the possession of large
fleets that the Central Powers lacked. Contrary to the Greek Premier, the new King of Greece, Constantine I was against such an action, and was in favour of the maintenance of neutrality. He was clearly impressed by the might of the German army but he was also under the influence exerted on him through his wife by her brother, the Kaiser. The Kaiser went further to propose that if Greece remained a benevolent neutral in favour of the Central Powers throughout the duration of the war, Germany at the end of it would assist Greece to fulfil her national claims. This meant German support for the cession of Doiran and Gevgeli area in case of a Serbo-Bulgarian war, the annexation of Albania, of the Dodecanese from Italy and of the islands Chios, Mytilene and Samos from Turkey. (43)

Venizelos for his part informed Serbia that he would honour their treaty if Serbia was attacked by Bulgaria. As early as July 1914, Bulgaria had made contact with Austro-Hungary and Germany, aiming to receive territorial concessions at the expense of Greece. Most of all, she had premeditated the war against Serbia which was her part of the agreement with the Central Powers. (44) The Anglo-French offer of an alliance to Greece, through their diplomatic missions in Athens, hinting at future recognition of Greek administration over the valuable Asia Minor coast, was a vague promise which became the bait that was dangled before the Greek politicians. The Allies wanted Greece to assist them militarily in their forthcoming expedition to the Dardanelles, as Greece's help was vital to secure the Western flank of the whole operation. Venizelos was sure that, in return for participating in the operation, Greece was likely to receive vital territories inhabited by Greek people which would realise the vision of the Great Idea. The creation of a larger Greek state that would include territories in Asia Minor, Northern Epirus, the Dodecanese, the islands of the Northern and Eastern Aegean and Northern Greece, inhabited mainly by Greek speaking people. Even if the operation in
the Dardanelles failed, which it did, Venizelos believed that Greece would be able to claim its promised new lands and to guard its interests in Northern Epirus, Asia Minor and - why not - even Cyprus too. (45) The Entente attempted to lure Greece into committing itself to the Allies by allowing the occupation of Northern Epirus by Greek forces, even though that meant severing relations between the Entente Powers (Britain and France) and Italy, which the Allies wanted on their side. But King Constantine and his Chief of Staff, General John Metaxas, were reluctant to allow the use of Greek troops either to back up the Allies or to protect the Serbian state from a possible Bulgarian attack. In October 1915, the Allies landed in Salonika to support the Serbian front. When they saw that Greece was unwilling to assist them, they turned to Bulgaria and bribed her with territorial concessions against Greece and Serbia in order to draw her over to their side. Thus Eastern Thrace from Adrianople to the Kavalla region was offered without success to Bulgaria, which furthermore demanded to be given Salonika as well. (46)

In June 1917 the Allies landed in Piraeus and forced the abdication of King Constantine followed by his exile and that of many supporters, including Metaxas, of the pro-German camp in Greece. The country then took part in the First World War in the year 1918 and formed the Macedonian front which placed the Bulgarian army in a difficult position and forced them to surrender in September 1918. With the Treaties of Neuilly in 1919 and of Sevres in 1920, with Bulgaria and Turkey respectively, the Greek dream of enlarging the boundaries of the Greek nation was accomplished. The Treaty of Sevres was not ratified by the Turks. Still the Liberals and their leader Venizelos could proudly speak of "Greece of the two Continents and the five Seas".

Greece had not only gained the hinterland of Smyrna that was to be administered by the Greeks but also Greek
sovereignty over the islands of the Northern and Eastern Aegean (with the exception of Tenedos and Imbros, which were to be demilitarised), and the whole of Eastern and Western Thrace. Furthermore it acquired the right to take part in the international commission that was to control the Straits. These considerable gains at the expense of the Bulgarians and the Turks were won through the continuous encouragement of Lloyd George who, apart from being a “philhellene” himself, was attempting to secure possessions for Britain in Anatolia. British statesmen needed a strong guardian in Asia Minor to protect the way to Iraq, Egypt and the Indian Empire against the possible Turkish danger presented by Kemal. “Lloyd George believed that Venizelos would enable him to go on waging war against the Turks with the Greek forces, without using a single Tommy. Lloyd George wanted victory, but was decided to pay for it only with Greek blood.”(47)

In retrospect we can now review Greek relations with the Great Powers and the Balkans. In the first case, we can clearly speak of political fractions and political affiliations. Venizelos and the Liberal party were connected with the country or countries that had traditionally helped and protected the independence of Greece years ago.

11) 1919-1923

It was the establishment of the Anglophile, the Francophile and the Russophile parties in Greece during the Greek Rebellion in 1821 which tipped the balance of Greek politics towards Great Britain and France. And it was the fleet again which had influenced Venizelos to align his country with the British coalition during World War I. On the other side of the political arena was the final arbiter of Greek politics, the King, who favoured a pro-German approach. He was driven by his personal feelings towards the German camp and by the influence exerted on him by his wife. And it was the
bitter conflict between those two men which signified the clash of the two policies, and of the rival existing political power, which caused the National Schism.

In relation to the Balkan countries, Greece established close relations with the countries that at that time at least, did not tend to threaten her territorial integrity. Venizelos, seeing that the Turkish Empire was at its very end, understood that the rest of the Balkan states would soon fight for the distribution of the Turkish spoils. In this gamble the foreign Powers intervened and shifted the balance of the political game to suit their goals. In this power struggle for spheres of influence, Greece shifted towards the Allies or the Central Powers according to who (Prime Minister or Monarch) managed to control Greek public opinion. Thus internal political division was created between the two dominant camps which influenced directly or indirectly Greek foreign policy and vice-versa.

It was Lloyd George who urged Venizelos to land Greek troops in Smyrna in May 1919 which were in October 1920 to advance inland against the Turkish forces in order to restore order after the upheaval caused by the Kemalists. It was the French through their Premier Georges Clemenceau who pressed Venizelos to assist the Allies in their ill-fated operation against the Bolsheviks in Odessa. Quickly though, the French changed sides when they saw that the Greek penetration in Asia Minor was becoming unattainable and entered into an agreement with Kemal. In October 1921 they signed a treaty with Kemal settling their differences and undertaking to supply the Kemalist troops with arms and equipment. This step was the first substantial sign of division between Britain and France since the Paris Peace Treaty.

The Italians who had already opposed any Greek landing in Smyrna, decided to withdraw their claim to the territory of Cilicia and to pour arms to the Kemalist forces. Greece therefore was left alone with the Treaty of Sevres as a dead
letter and a British Prime Minister who was willing to apply all his good will in favour of Greece, but was unwilling to clash with France and Fascist Italy over the Greek advance in Asia Minor. So while the French and the Italians shipped arms to Kemal, the British stubbornly refused to support Greece even financially due to the so-called strict neutrality of the Allies proclaimed in April 1921, a neutrality which was to be implemented only by the British and only towards the Greeks. (50) Thus the end of the Greek campaign in Asia Minor could not be long delayed. The destruction of Smyrna and the annihilation of the Greek army in Turkey was a traumatic set back, even worse than the aftermath of the Turkish victory in the 1897 war.

With the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the vision of the Great Idea crumbled. Some of the bloodily won territorial victories of the two Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and of the Great War were lost in a pitiful clash with Turkey for the sake of the interests of the Great Powers which manipulated the conflict in order to serve their own imperialistic interests.

Until 1923, Greek foreign policy towards the Balkans and the European capitals was exercised with the scope of expanding the nation under the guidance and the auspices of one (usually Britain) or two Great Powers. From the year 1923 which signified the utter end of the Greek irredentism Greek statesmen tried to save their existing nation from the gluttony of neighbouring countries and primarily of Bulgaria, Italy and Albania through the use of bilateral agreements and treaties aimed at establishing a strong defensive Balkan bloc. This policy was pursued by Greece until 1936, when the dictatorship of General Metaxas combined with the rise of Italian, German and Spanish Fascism in Europe gave a new perspective to Greek politics.

While from 1923 until 1935 Greek Premiers had as their target the establishment of Balkan coalitions, the dictator Metaxas invested his effort in coming to terms with the old
Great Powers of Europe and at the same time maintaining a balance between the personal admiration and respect he had for Germany and the vital need of the support offered by Great Britain and her powerful fleet.

Greece came out of the Asia Minor fiasco, financially, psychologically and militarily defeated. The country suffered a heavy military defeat which had furthermore strained the economic situation of the state. Not to mention the plight of 1.5 million refugees from Asia Minor to Greece, something which put a heavy burden on the already overstretched financial ability of the nation, obliged to accommodate and assist these people. Thus Venizelos turned to diplomacy to settle inter-Balkan affairs.

Facing the ever growing antagonism of Bulgaria with its revisionistic policy in the Balkans, Italian hostility manifested in the Corfu incident in 1923, and the Yugoslav and Turkish demands for the re-establishment of the original borders, Greek Premiers were to choose the “soft glove” of the delicate approach rather than the “iron fist” in order to obtain their goals.(51) As soon as he was back in office as Greek Premier once again in August 1928 Venizelos attempted to distance himself from the customary Anglophile policy and turned to approach Italy. Though Greco-Italian relations were not warm after the Corfu incident and the Asia Minor catastrophe, in which Italy contributed indirectly (not as a combatant, but as a supplier of arms to Turkey) to the Greek collapse, Venizelos set aside his differences with Greece’s western opponent, on the matters of Northern Epirus and the Dodecanese, and concluded a Greco-Italian Pact of Friendship and Cooperation, on 23rd September 1928. That meant that Greece had largely to abandon her claims in Northern Epirus which she did unwillingly and tacitly,
whereas Venizelos explained publicly that the Dodecanese issue was not a barrier to Italo-Greek relations. (52)

Venizelos turned to the other Balkan states too. On the one hand, the country was under great obligation to Great Britain which held two thirds of the national debt. It was still dependent on the British fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean for the protection of the sea lanes and convoys. Britain was unwilling however, to conclude bilateral agreements with Greece guaranteeing the national frontiers of the country. France, too, was not interested at the time in any closer engagement with Greece. The British were interested in blocking Russian penetration into the Balkans rather than in guaranteeing Greece's territorial integrity themselves. France was trying to establish its own influence in the Balkans with the creation of the Little Entente and with the primary goal of strengthening Yugoslavia that would act, along with the other nations of Eastern and South Europe, as a barrier to any possible German infiltration in the region.

Another aim of the Little Entente was to stop Hungarian and Bulgarian domination in the Balkans. Britain played the ever old existing game of 'divide and rule' without wanting to commit herself to any actual obligation that would bring her closer to one nation and therefore distance her from another. She did not want the political balance to change drastically in favour of any country. As long as the Russian or, later on, the German presence in the Balkans was minor or non-existent, Britain preferred to abstain from any real assistance to Greece, frightened by the thought that it might upset the balance of the surviving status quo. (53)

France and Britain, but primarily the latter, tended to operate in the background rather than the foreground. Anyway, Britain knew better than anyone else that what kept Greece faithful to her was not the memory of Lord Byron but Britain's naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. So far that prerequisite was more than adequately covered. Greece therefore, was not to change sides easily. But even if
it did, it could not align herself with any other power unless it was a country which also had a strong naval presence in the Mediterranean. At that time, the only two countries that had large fleets were France and Britain, so Greece had to depend on either or both of those. Moreover, Greek public opinion and most of the Greek statesmen were either pro-British or pro-French and that too could not change easily.

But Venizelos turned to Turkey as well. His official trip to Ankara was to be rewarded with the Greco-Turkish Agreement of 1930 for the maintenance of the existing borders and the establishment of a common policy on economic and political matters. Moreover, no naval armaments were to be undertaken by either of the two states without informing the other. This was a successful rapprochement with Turkey, eight years after the Greek catastrophe in Asia Minor. Turkey sought such an agreement with Greece with the encouragement of Great Britain, who welcomed such a close cooperation between the two previous adversaries, since that agreement served indirectly British interests in the area and maintenance of British influence on both countries. Turkey preferred the new approach to Britain and Greece even if that meant the loss of the old ties with Germany.

Three years later, in October 1933, a further agreement between Greece and Turkey was signed which had a clearly defensive character against Bulgarian expansionism. In both these Greco-Turkish reconciliations the silent approval of Great Britain and the encouragement of Italy was felt. Venizelos was reluctant to press Britain to cede Cyprus to Greece even if he could have afforded to do so; neither did he approve the uprising in Cyprus in 1931 aiming at the Enosis (unification) with the mainland. He categorically stated the there was no Cypriot problem between Greece and Britain, only between the British and the Cypriots.

But the Greek Government made a significant approach to Yugoslavia as well. She had had an alliance since 1913 but
this had been denounced by Yugoslavia in 1924 when Greece and Bulgaria agreed to the intervention of the League of Nations to protect the Slav minorities living in Greece. Thus there was an outstanding difference between the two capitals. Yugoslavia had a hidden goal: that of an outlet to the Aegean Sea and Salonika. That was proven later on, when in 1941 Germany gallantly rewarded Yugoslavia with Salonika to ensure its cooperation during the attack on Greece.

At the same time, Belgrade demanded the creation of a free 'corridor' to Salonika for the development of Yugoslavian commerce in time of peace and in the event of a war, the right to supply itself through this harbour, something which would have clearly dragged Greece into that war as well.(57) However a Greco-Yugoslav Pact was signed on 27th March 1929 under the leadership of Venizelos which involved certain concessions at Salonika and the use of a railway connecting the port with the Yugoslav hinterland. Venizelos had managed to smooth the Greco-Yugoslav differences.(58)

But the most important of all the coalitions of the Balkan countries was the Balkan Pact of Rumania, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey which was signed in February 1934 by the Government of Panagiotis Tsaldaris. All the countries involved guaranteed existing borders and stated that they would come to each other's aid if attacked by any other Balkan country, which actually meant Bulgaria and Albania. But with the refusal of Albania and Bulgaria to participate, the Pact was very weak indeed. It simply came to mean the coalition of the rest of the Balkan countries against Bulgaria and Albania. But its greatest weakness lay in its inability to provide safeguards against foreign intervention and intrusion in the peninsula.

None of the participants was willing to defend the interests of the other member states if attacked by any non-Balkan power. Greece had no intention of assisting Yugoslavia against possible Italian aggression. Turkey was also
unwilling to be drawn into a Russian-Rumanian or a Hungarian-Rumanian war. Yugoslavia was not prepared to confront any Italian influence in Albania and to guarantee Greece's northern borders. In the real world, the Pact remained a dead letter which merely signified an anti-Bulgarian spirit and possibly a warning to the already insignificant Albania. But neither of these nations was going to invade any other Balkan countries without strong backing from a powerful non-Balkan nation, in which case the Pact would be ineffectual.

It is important to understand that not only were the Balkan states unable to seal an effective alliance among themselves, but also political and economic shifts and military insecurity inside the Balkan Pact itself led the members to come to terms with non-Balkan states as well as with Bulgaria (their hypothetical enemy), so weakening even more the cohesion of the alliance by allowing foreign intervention in the form of more pacts. In other words the primary reason for which the Pact was constructed was not attained; on the contrary it widened the existing gaps between the countries in the Balkans. (59)

Additionally, the 1934 Balkan Pact brought more division and disagreement among its members than the stability and cohesion expected. Turkey was afraid that the pact might bring her into direct confrontation with Russia and requested that a protocol be made which would exclude any Turkish obligations towards the pact if its implementation brought Turkey into war with Russia. In the same way Greece requested that she be allowed to abstain from her obligations to the other three members of the pact, if these obligations should force Greece to clash with Italy. In this way, Greece and Turkey were the first members of the pact to contribute to its dissolution. Ironically though, it was Italy which attacked Greece in 1940, though the latter country in 1934 had attempted to please Italy by restricting the Balkan Pact. (60)
With the rise of Italian and German power in Europe and the retreat of France from Eastern European affairs, the situation became even worse and forced each Balkan nation to re-adjust its own foreign policy without prior consultation with the other members of the Pact, and without attempting synchronization of their efforts for peace and tranquillity in the area. The same applied to attempts of Balkan nations to strengthen mutual security bilaterally, for example the Greek approach leading to the compact with Turkey in October 1933 under the Government of Panagiotis Tsaldaris mentioned above and the new agreement with Turkey in April 1938 under the leadership of Metaxas.

Under the 1938 accord with Turkey it was agreed that in case of war between one of the two signatories and a third country, the other signatory would not allow the use of its territory by the enemy against the first one. That second accord had a duration of ten years. However these two pacts with Turkey (of 1933 and 1938) did not finally strengthen the position of Greece as it was believed at the time. On the contrary they had left Greece's position and security weak as they had allowed for a small, narrow, but extremely vulnerable, "corridor" for offensive action against Greece, whether by Balkan or outside powers. In the 1933 agreement it was agreed that both states would defend and support each other in case of a hostile attack on their "common borders".

This peculiar term was to become the Achilles's heel for Greece in 1941 and an excellent opportunity for Turkey to dishonour her obligations towards Greece and evade any responsibility for assisting her against the German attack. Clearly both the above mentioned pacts with Turkey implied, when the agreements took place, a possible offensive action by Bulgaria against Greece and/or Turkey. The possibility of an attack by Italy and Germany against Greece and/or Turkey was not obvious back in 1938 when the accord was signed. But the use of the phrase "common borders" left it
unclear (whether deliberately or not by Turkey is unknown) whether that term applied to the Greco-Turkish borders only or if it included the Greco-Bulgarian and the Turco-Bulgarian frontier lines. As it was, in April 1941, for Turkey the term applied only to the Turco-Greek borders. In that case Turkey had no obligation whatsoever to assist Greece, since the German attack on Greece of April 1941 and the later Bulgarian declaration of war on Greece and the entry of Bulgarian troops into Greece, took place only through the Bulgaro-Greek frontier line without the violation of the Turco-Bulgarian one.

Greece had sought to clarify the issue, but the then Turkish Foreign Minister, Rousde Arass, assured the Greeks on 4th November 1934, that it was needless to do so since it was obvious that the whole Turco-Bulgaro-Greek borders were to be defended in case of war. In 1941 Turkey gave a different interpretation from that given by the Turkish Foreign Office in 1934 and simply allowed both the German and later on the Bulgarian troops to enter in the Greek soil, unmolested by any Turkish intervention. (62) It is important to note that both the 1933 bilateral Agreement of Cooperation between the two countries, and the 1938 new additional treaty with Turkey, were not followed by a particular and concrete military alliance with Turkey. As a result of that, Greece was in a position, to claim Turkish assistance and support under these two treaties, but without being able to invoke any specific commitment to military aid from Turkey.

Bulgaro-Greek relations were not friendly at all. Bulgaria was unwilling to enter in any discussion with Greece for settling the territorial revision that she wanted. She deliberately remained away from any alliance with any other Balkan nation favouring peace and insisted on trying to dissolve the Balkan Entente. Bulgaria had been defeated in the second Balkan War, had been a loser in the First World War, having to cede territory to Greece. She was unwilling therefore to settle any issue with Greece, unless her
territorial demands were fulfilled to the utmost. She refused to join the 1934 Balkan bloc. (63) In 1925 Bulgarian frontier troops shot a Greek border guard and a little later a captain of the Greek army. The Greek reply was spontaneous, massive and excessive. Greece retaliated, by the advance of the III Army Corps into Bulgarian territory, without declaring war. Bulgaria hastily appealed to the League of Nations accusing Greece of violating Bulgarian territorial integrity but not referring to the border skirmishes caused by its own troops which had provoked the Greek advance. The result was that Greece was ordered by the League of Nations to pay a sum of 30 million leva as reparation to Sofia. (64)

Bulgaria also refused to join in the Greco-Turkish rapprochement as long as she could not obtain any border rectification in her favour. In January 1937, she signed a Bulgaro-Yugoslav Pact which detracted from the already weakened status of the Balkan Pact, since it meant that Yugoslavia could not fulfil her obligations to the Pact in the event of war between Bulgaria and the remaining of the members of the Balkan Entente. That Bulgaro-Yugoslav rapprochement was supported by Britain and Italy which favoured such Balkan alliances. The Greek approach to Sofia was more than friendly. In July 1938, with the support of Britain and Russia, John Metaxas undertook the initiative to sign in Salonika, on behalf of Greece, Rumania, Turkey and Yugoslavia, an agreement with Bulgaria under which the provisions of the Neuilly Treaty of 1919, forbidding Bulgarian rearmament, were abolished, though Greece should have known very well that a future rearmament of Bulgaria might constitute a threat to Northern Greece, as it did in 1941. (65)

Later on, in the summer of 1940, the Bulgarian press spoke of Bulgaria's claims to Greek territory especially in Thrace. (66) Bulgaria, by adopting an unfriendly attitude, did not enable any large movement of Greek troops from Eastern
to Western Macedonia, when the Italian attack on Greece started in October 1940. She adopted a hostile attitude against Greece, thus contributing to the weakening position of the Greek troops in Albania. Finally in April 1941, when the German attack was launched against Greece, Bulgaria acted as the guardian of the Bulgaro-Turkish borders to prevent the far-off possibility of any Turkish assistance to Greece. For that assistance to the Axis, Bulgaria received the area of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, in which areas she played the role of the prison warden. In 1942, Bulgaria proceeded to the formal annexation of the above mentioned territories. (67)

The relations of Greece with the newly created nation of Albania were also strained due to its position within the Italian sphere of influence. Like Bulgaria, Albania refused to join the Balkan Entente of 1934 which, according to Richard Clogg, was the culminating result of a series of conferences held mainly on Greek initiative in Athens (1930), Istanbul (1931), Bucharest (1932) and Salonika (1933). Albania’s insistence on raising the question of her ethnic minorities within Greece, exactly as Bulgaria did, was an obstacle to any further improvement of her relations with Greece and the rest of the Balkan states. (68) Albania demanded as a precondition to any final settlement, the compulsory rectification of the Greco-Albanian borders. Albania claimed the area covered by Monastir, Kitsevo, Tetovo, Pristina, Metrovitsi, Ipek, Podgorines and the region west of the River Arachthos. (69)

To that we must add the complete programme of anti-Hellenic activity which took place in Northern Epirus, including propaganda and the formation of Albanian irregular (irredentist) forces who pillaged the Greek inhabitants in Albania. It included the confiscation of Greek land, the prohibition on teaching the Greek language in the schools of Albania and the prohibition of carrying on certain professions and occupations. Albania was tied to the Italian
chariot which with the Italo-Albanian agreements of 1926 and 1927 made it even more difficult for Greece to set aside her differences with Albania. However it was Greece that first recognized in September 1928 the proclamation of King Zog as the King of Albania and she allowed many Albanian students to study in Greek universities and military academies aiding them with Greek scholarships. Still the doors that would allow the harmonization of the Greek-Albanian relations remained hermetically sealed. (70)

At the time of Hitler’s rise to power, the relations of Greece with Britain and France were good, but not close enough to conclude any Greek military alliance with these two countries. France had established her influence in the Little Entente which she had developed by having Yugoslavia as the axis of her support towards the Balkan nations through means of loans, military missions and cultural propaganda. France slowly became the supporter and protector of the existing pacts and alliances in the Balkans with the aim of containing German and Italian influence in the economic sphere. But the system of the Little Entente, and of the Balkan Pact, soon started to collapse.

"In 1936 the Little Entente was brutally shaken when it freed every member from any binding obligation to mutual assistance in the event of an attack and allowed individual bilateral agreements." (71) The result was a staggering blow when Bulgaria aligned herself with Yugoslavia in 1937. But later on, the same year, Yugoslavia concluded an Italo-Yugoslav Pact which determined the fate of the Balkan Entente and of the French system of collective security. (72) The Italo-Yugoslav Friendship Pact of 1937 was a clear violation of the Balkan one. The Yugoslav Premier Milan Stojadinovic, throughout the negotiations for the signing of the 1937 Pact, pressed the Italians about Yugoslavia’s ambitions in the Balkan peninsula. In December 1937 when Mussolini was host to the Yugoslav Premier in Rome, the
latter spoke of Yugoslavia's territorial claim to an outlet to the Aegean.

One should also mention the entry of Bulgaria to the Balkan alliance with the 1938 Pact of Salonika releasing Bulgaria from the restrictions of the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919 in return for nothing more than a promise (which was not kept) that Bulgaria would stop seeking frontier revision by force. Once the agreement of the pact between the Balkan Entente and Bulgaria had been concluded, the Bulgarian Premier met with Stojadinovic in Nyssa. The Bulgarian Prime Minister proposed to Stojadinovic the dismembering of Greece. The Bulgarians would take Thrace and the Yugoslavs Salonika. But Prince Paul of Yugoslavia rejected such a proposal. (73)

In Greece itself, two-thirds of all foreign investments were British (electrical, transport, shipping, telegraph and banking). France came second with interests in banking, port facilities, gas, and mines. Slowly but gradually, Germany was gaining the upper hand in trade. Britain was the dominant factor in the Mediterranean and German policy in the area still lacked support in terms of real power. Britain aimed at securing the existing equilibrium. Greece was following the British policy. In 1935 during the Abyssinian war, Greece not only supported the League of Nations in applying sanctions against Italy but assured Britain that Greece would go to war with Italy if she retaliated with military action against Britain. (74)

With the coming of Metaxas to power in August 1936, the British were at first alarmed due to his pro-German orientation. He had studied in the Potsdam military academy, from which he had graduated with high honours and had won for himself the nickname "Little Moltke." (75) He was against the entry of Greece in World War I in favour of the Entente because he was impressed by the German military power and
its potential for winning the war. Moreover, like most pro-
German officers and citizens of Greece, he was forced into
compulsory exile, in Italy, when the Allies forced King
Constantine to abdicate in 1917. Metaxas spent his exile
years in Sicily and Siena, and he was deeply affected by the
Fascist element in that country: the Fascist salute and
uniforms, the creation of the Youth Organization, the strict
press and mass media censorship, the establishment of a
secret police that spied on political opponents, the harsh
treatment of the communists, etc. His right wing military
dictatorship in Greece from 1936 onwards- and after his
death in 1941 his successors followed the same policy-
shared many common elements with Italian Fascism and the
German National-Socialism. He was also a fervent admirer of
the German serious spirit Ernsthaftigkeit which he tried to
implant on the Greeks.(76)

British statesmen quickly realised that what exerted the
most important influence on the Government of Metaxas was
the ability of Britain to exercise her naval supremacy in the
Eastern Mediterranean and her capacity to import Greek
tobacco to British markets.(77) Metaxas tried to follow a
balanced policy towards Britain and Germany as far as
economic policy was concerned. But Britain's inability to buy
large quantities of Greek tobacco, due partly to the
preference in Britain for Virginia brands obliged Metaxas to
turn necessarily to Germany, which consumed at that time
large supplies of Greek agricultural products.

At the same time Greece was compelled to get most of its
imports from Germany too. This had another result as well.
Through this barter agreement with Germany, Greece
obtained most of its military equipment. Metaxas tried to
balance his dependence on Germany by offering to sell the
British Greek tobacco and currants, but the results were
disappointing.(78)

Despite his pro-German inclination Metaxas was not risking
exchanging the traditional presence of Great Britain for the
temporary and passing German domination of the Greek economy and market. The British Government assisted and backed the regime of 4th August. Metaxas was glad to retain the British Naval Mission in Greece. No German mission of military character was ever established in Greece under Metaxas' leadership. Metaxas would never envisage opposing the Greek monarch, who had lived in London for a long time and was also closely connected to the Royal Family of Britain: he was King George VI's second cousin. Two years before he assumed office, Metaxas had wisely declared that Greece could not afford to pursue a policy hostile to that of Great Britain. And on 24th June 1937 he had stated that "all his country's interests are bound together with Great Britain. Germany is not a Mediterranean power. How can I ever allow my personal feelings to influence my country's foreign policy?". (79)

Greece is predominantly a Mediterranean country and naturally its foreign policy had lean towards the strongest naval powers in the area, that is to say Britain and France. Greece as a poor country was unable to construct its own large fleet to protect the country and the sea routes and the convoys. Greece was therefore, forced to obtain British protection against the outside dangers posed by potential Italian aggression against Greece, as during the Corfu incident of 1923, in which Britain had intervened and handed Mussolini an ultimatum demanding the immediate evacuation of the Italian forces from the island. (80)

Greece could never have managed to achieve such a prompt solution to the problem had she not been backed by Britain and France. So Britain and France were to balance the hostility exerted by the enemies of Greece through their presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. The critical question which tortured Metaxas was for how long could Britain and France perform such a role and what could happen if they ceased to do so.
Britain tended to overlook the main characteristics of the Greek dictatorial regime which had quite a few similarities with those of the German and the Italian states. With the incentive of safeguarding the sensitive and fragile political-strategic Eastern Mediterranean space, Britain supported the Metaxas Government. The general support offered by Britain and France to the relatively small Mediterranean states had strengthened their will to resist any expansion of Italy in those countries and at the same time eased Britain's role in the maintenance of control over the strategic route to India and Australia. An example of this support and acceptance by Britain of the Metaxas regime was what Antony Eden wrote in his book The Reckoning on 29th January 1941, the day Metaxas died. According to Eden, Metaxas' death was a heavy blow. Greece, being a small country would not be able to produce two such great men.

Greece was, of course, frustrated by the attitudes adopted by Britain to issues that had to do with the territorial claims of the Greeks. The Cyprus subject remained untouched by Britain and that constituted a major disappointment for Greek public opinion. By the Treaty of Lausanne the island of Cyprus had passed from Turkey to Britain, since Turkey had withdrawn any claim to the island. Britain threatened Italy with war in 1923 if she did not leave Corfu, but on the other hand, she did not use her prestige to persuade Italy to cede to Greece the Dodecanese which were still under Italian occupation. It is true that Britain contained Italian expansion, but without regarding the Dodecanese issue as part of that threat. Britain silently allowed their control by Italy until the end of the Second World War and the islands were not handed over to Greece until 1947.

From 1936 onwards, Britain demanded a rise of 40% in the interest rates on its loans to Greece. When Greece pleaded for more money to buy military equipment, the British demanded a rise in interest rates on its financing too, though
they knew that Greece would not be able to pay her debts. (84) The British knew very well that Greece could not depend on any other country than Britain or France due to the geographical position of Greece. They risked increasing the interest rates because Greece could not replace British military protection. Also they did not want to destabilise the equilibrium in the Eastern Mediterranean by strengthening the position of Greece vis-à-vis Turkey. With a loan of £2,000,000, Greece ordered military material with promised delivery dates before September 1939, but these were not met. (85) Later on, Greece chartered a significant part of her merchant fleet to Britain, an action which was considered by Germany as a serious departure from neutrality, and which could have provoked a possible direct conflict with Germany. (86) But the greater disappointment to Metaxas came when he proposed an alliance with Britain. His offer was turned down.

The British rejection was based on the objection that a close Greco-British relation based on a military and political agreement, would have "excited" Italian susceptibilities and that British public opinion would have objected as well, on the assumption that a direct commitment of Britain to defend Greece against an adversary would have strained the resources of Britain to the utmost. Metaxas himself failed to understand why Britain did not want such an alliance. He believed that Britain needed Greece and that Greek public opinion was whole-heartedly dedicated to Britain. (87)

The British claimed that their country could not undertake the risk of military operations, in support of Greece and that the military dictatorship of Metaxas was an unstable regime, but most of all it seems that they feared a military confrontation between Greece and Italy and/or Bulgaria in the near future. In such a way the basic incentive of the Greek Premier for his friendship to Britain, the search for guarantees of the independence and territorial integrity of his country were not "officially" accepted by Britain, and that
at a time when the Munich conference had finished and the situation in Northern and Central Europe was more critical than ever with a constantly growing Germany and the possibility of a major conflict looming ahead. Britain preferred to avoid by all possible means and at all costs, the possibility of a conflict with Italy in the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, the economic penetration of Germany in Greece was increasing. Between 1930 and 1938 Greek exports to Germany rose from 23.5 to 38.8 per cent and imports from Germany increased from 10.1 to 28.8 per cent. Due to the clearing agreement signed on 16th August 1932, between the Reichsbank and the Bank of Greece, the Greek state was able to export tobacco, currants and cotton and import equipment for both military and commercial use. On 3rd September 1936 the profit on Greek exports to Germany reached its peak, the amazing figure of 34.5 million Reichsmarks. Translated into Greek currency, that amounted to 1,400,000,000 Greek drachmas, which Metaxas used to buy military material mainly from Britain and Germany.

The British were forced to lose on the commercial aspect of the Greco-British relations since they were reluctant to follow the example of the barter agreements and demanded in most cases to be paid in hard currency. Even the Greek King with his personal relationship to King George VI was not able to influence the British to increase the amount of tobacco imports to Britain. By 1938 Germany absorbed 40% of the Greek tobacco crop. That was the beneficial result of Dr. Schacht’s policy in South-Eastern Europe. According to Kovacs, the German infiltration in Greece might not have been so large in terms of the political and the military side as the British one was (in terms of material only it was), but Berlin spent large sums on cultural propaganda and archaeological research. "Herr Bande, head of the Foreign Department of the Propaganda Ministry, and Baron von Weisenhof, chief of its Balkan Division, led several 'cultural missions' to Greece."
Thus the economic penetration and the domination of the Greek economy by Germany did not, in fact, mean the complete political manipulation of Metaxas or of Greek public opinion. Greece was the ever true protégé of Britain and France, because the geopolitical stability of the country mattered more than its economy and the personal affiliations of its leaders. In the Balkan peninsula, at least, the only obvious dangers which existed were Bulgaria and Albania, while Italian Fascism, though hostile to Greece, seemed quite a distant threat, since Italy had until then embarked in operations in North and East Africa only. However, within the next two years Greek anguish was centered mostly on the imminent danger emerging from the West and not from the traditional North or even the East, as always expected.
ii) Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War

On 17th March 1939, the Greek Ambassador to Belgrade, Rosettis, informed the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that a possible hostile action by Italy against Albania was to be anticipated within the next few days. (93) Though, the next day, the Italian capital rejected such a statement as a malicious lie, the Greek Ambassador to Belgrade did not count on Italian assurances, rightly as it proved. He had information from the German legation in Belgrade, that the Italian assurances were not to be trusted, since the occupation of Albania was a necessity for Italy, in order to transform it slowly into a giant military base for future operations in the Balkans. (94)

However, Italian sources from their Foreign Affairs Ministry tended to state that there was no real threat behind all the rumours concerning the impending invasion of Albania. Almost two weeks later, on 6th April, the Greek Minister to London, Charalambos Simopoulos, informed the Greek state that the Italian Government had given to the British one a formal assurance that it would not consider any coup de main in Albania. (95) Simopoulos had been summoned to the Foreign Office and received that "sincere" information.

A day later, however, the situation changed radically. On Good Friday, the Greek Minister in Tirana, Skeferis telegraphed to Athens that Italian planes were flying over the Albanian sky dropping leaflets requesting the peaceful attitude of the Albanian population towards the invading Italian forces, while Italian warships bombarded Durazzo. The invasion had already started. (96) The Italian forces quickly smashed the ineffective Albanian resistance and on 8th April 1939, imposed an Italophile Government in Tirana under the leadership of Prime Minister Shefkhet Verlaci.

The Albanian King Zog and his family were forced to leave the country and entered Greek territory, where they created
an initial embarrassment to the Greek state since it was thought that their presence could electrify the Greco-Italian relations, if King Zog decided to engage in any anti-Italian actions or declarations. The initial Italian occupation forces that took part in the first stage of the Albanian operation consisted of three divisions which quickly followed up the conquest of the rest of the country.(97)

Metaxas, though alarmed, kept calm. He rejected all proposals from the General Staff to take military steps that would strengthen Greece in the event of an Italian attack and allowed King Zog to remain in Greece, only under strict surveillance, so as to exclude the possibility of any anti-Italian gestures from the Albanians in Greece, while he arranged for Zog's immediate departure for Turkey.(98)

Metaxas informed the British Minister in Athens, Sydney Waterlow, that Greece would resist any Italian attack and that he would prefer the total destruction of his country rather than dishonour.(99) In the meantime, Count Ciano and Mussolini had reassured Britain that no action was contemplated against any other country in the Balkan peninsula and that the troops in Albania would be removed once peace and tranquillity were established and Italian citizens and interests were safeguarded adequately.(100) Britain demanded that such reassurances should be given directly to the Greeks. It was instantly done, reaffirming Italy's good will, her intention to respect the territorial integrity of Greece to the last and her desire for a closer, deeper and more substantial friendship.(101)

Thus, through the direct intervention of Britain, Greece had received her first assurances from Italy, so much needed at the time. The Greeks had been concerned with the presence of the Italian forces so close to their borders, even temporarily, as Italy had publicly declared. The Greek Government was pressed by the military authorities to organise defence measures against any Italian attack, even partial mobilisation. The Greek leadership, and specifically
Metaxas, refrained from doing so, in order not to offer any pretext to the Italian side for “misunderstanding”.(102) One reason for Greece’s not at all unfounded fear was a telegram from her Royal embassy in London to Athens stating the possibility of an Italian landing in Corfu.(103) When the British Government learnt of that, it summoned the Italian Counsellor in London, Guido Crolla and Lord Edward Halifax informed him that any action that violated Greece’s territorial integrity would be “regarded by H.M.G as a threat to vital British interests and treated as such”.(104) Lord Halifax suggested that assurances ruling out such hostile action from Italy against Greece should be given at once to the Greek Government.

On 10th April, the Italian Minister in Athens, Count Emmanuele Grazzi called on Metaxas and read him a communication from the Duce stating beyond any reasonable doubt the intention of Italy to “respect absolutely the integrity of both the mainland and islands of Greece”.(105) However the news from the Albania was becoming more alarming all the time. On 12th April 1939, the Greek Minister to Tirana, Skeferis, telegraphed to Athens that Italian officers were speaking of the realisation of Albania’s national aspirations and there was a talk about a military action against Ciamuria, expected to begin on 23rd April.

Earlier, on 8th April, the commander of an Italian battalion entering Tirana had spoken of Italy enlarging Albania’s territory.(106) And on 14th April 1939, the Vice-Consul at Santi Quaranta reported back to the Greek Foreign Office that on 7th April, the Vice-Consulate had been riddled with bullets for 45 minutes and that Italian marines had entered the building with fixed bayonets. Only after the repeated protests of the Vice-Consul himself to the military commander, did the marines decide to evacuate the Greek premises.(107)

On 10th April, the Greek Minister in London called at the Foreign Office and “begged that he should know in advance
of any decision regarding Greece" arising from recent Italian actions and rumours of further moves against Greece.(108) The result of the Albanian affair was the well known guarantees given to Greece and Rumania on 13th April 1939 by Britain and France. It should be noted that these guarantees had been given by both states voluntarily without Greece asking for them. The guarantee read:

"...in the event of action being taken which clearly threatened the independence of Greece and which the Greek Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend to the Greek Government all support in their power....."(109)

These British and French declarations of assistance to the Greeks, tended to raise the morale of the Greeks and diminish the effect of the Italian provocations on the people and the Government but they did not exclude the possibility of a conflict altogether. Britain and France wanted simply to discourage any Italian action against Greece without risking an escalation of the present highly charged crisis and, more important, without engaging themselves in any real and substantial military commitment that could drag them into a major diplomatic conflict or, even worse, into a war.(110)

Nor did the news from the European capitals put Greece at rest. On 21st April 1939, the Greek Minister to Belgrade sent a message to Athens indicating that Mussolini had promised the Albanians the enlargement of their borders. Six days later, another telegram from Tirana sounded the alarm in Athens about a future attack of Italy on Greece, while on 25th June 1939, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, Chief of the Italian Staff, spoke about the extension of the Albanian territory.(111)

In the meantime, Ciano in his diary on 12th May has the following entry: "Public works are starting well. The roads are planned in such a way as to lead to the Greek border."
This plan was ordered by the Duce, who is thinking more and more of attacking Greece at the first opportunity. On 25th May Ciano writes again in his diary that Mussolini is increasingly anti-Greek. (112)

Due to these rumours which had excited the Greek Government, Metaxas asked to speak to the Italian Minister in Athens on 21st August 1939. He protested about Italy's hostile attitude towards Greece which he said was unfounded and completely unreasonable. He stigmatized Italy's assistance regarding Albanian irredentism against Greece and complained about the Albanian claims in Kossovo and Ciamuria which the Italian press favoured. Metaxas apologised for Greece's sanctions against Italy during the Abyssinian war of 1935 at a time before he was Premier, but explained that Greece could not have done otherwise, since failure to do so would have caused clashes with Britain and France.

He went on to complain about the Italian provocations regarding the return of Corfu to Italy and the anti-Greek propaganda in the Dodecanese which had resulted in an outflow of many refugees from the islands to mainland Greece. Metaxas informed the Italian Minister that the rumours of an impending Italian invasion on Greece and/or landing on Corfu added to the tension between the two countries. The Greek General said that the Italian song "Sbarcheremo al Pireo e conquisteremo tutto l'Egeo" (we will land in Pireaus and conquer the whole Aegean), sung by Italian soldiers was an indication of Italian aspirations and not friendship as Grazzi claimed. The Greek Premier explained to Grazzi that the Anglo-French guarantees were unilaterally made. Greece had not asked for them and similarly she could not reject them. At the end of the conversation, General Metaxas assured Count Grazzi of Greece's friendly attitude towards Italy but asked the Italian Minister to telegraph to Rome that "should an attack be made on the integrity of our territory, or should our vital interests
be assailed, in that case we would fight to defend them". (113)

On 29th August 1939, the Italian Military Attaché Colonel Luigi Mondini visited General Alexander Papagos and requested information concerning the Greek defence measures in Northern Macedonia and Epirus. To that Papagos answered that the forces there had been reinforced, but this was due to the large Italian military exercises which were taking place close to the Greco-Albanian frontiers.

Colonel Montini replied that Italy had reaffirmed its friendly attitude towards Greece and could see no justification for such a large scale reinforcement (through personal drafts in order to limit the panic from a public announcement). Papagos explained that flights of Italian airmen over Greek airspace and songs of Italian soldiers referring to the conquest of the Aegean and the Piraeus, had frightened local people and there was a need to soothe them. (114) Papagos requested that Italian airmen should cease to fly over Greek territory and the Italian colonel replied that this was due to their "youth and over-excitement".

1j) After the outbreak of World War II

Greco-Italian relations came under re-consideration in September 1939 when the Greco-Italian Pact of Friendship of 1928 was due to expire. On 5th September, following Mussolini's declaration of neutrality, after the outbreak of war, Metaxas summoned Grazzi to explore the possibility of ameliorating Greco-Italian relations. Count Grazzi was recalled to Rome for consultation with the Duce; when he returned to Athens on 9th September 1939, he called on Metaxas to inform him of the Duce's decision to respect Greece's territorial sovereignty and that even if Italy, as a Great Power, decided to enter the war, it would not do so against Greece. As a token of Italian friendship towards
Greece, Italian troops stationed in Albania were to be ordered to withdraw 20 km from the Greco-Albanian border.

Count Grazzi was told by the Duce while in Rome that he was willing to bridge the differences and misunderstandings that existed between Greece and Italy, to cooperate with Greece in both political and economic matters, and to sell Greece military equipment, specifically planes and guns. (115) Ciano, who had accompanied Grazzi to the Duce, wrote in his diary on 12th September, that the Duce "gave instructions for an understanding with Greece, a country too poor for us to covet". (116) On 15th September 1939 Grazzi saw Metaxas and conveyed to him, among other things, the desire of Mussolini to draw up a new treaty of friendship and cooperation with Greece. According to Grazzi, Metaxas was delighted to hear of these new Italian views regarding Greece and said to Grazzi that this was the happiest day of his life and of that of Greece. (117)

Metaxas, however, rushed to send a cable to Simopoulos in London to approach the British Government concerning the Italian proposal for the renewal of the Pact of 1928. Metaxas did not want to take any steps whatsoever that could possibly be unwelcome to Britain. (118) At the beginning, the British Government did not reject the renewal of the Greco-Italian Pact, as long as the Greek Government retained full liberty of action in case of a conflict arising between Italy and Great Britain. (119)

Metaxas was disturbed by the British reply since he rightly believed that the British Government did not trust that he would back them up in case of an Italo-British war and that is why they preferred to impose on Greece the clause about full liberty of action. He explained to the new British Minister in Athens Michael Palairet that he had sought the advice of Britain concerning the Italian proposal and he was not intending to threaten Britain with a possible military alliance with Italy. He went as far as to declare that he
would not sign a renewal of the pact if the British Government did not want him to do so.(120)

The British Government wanted to ensure the possibility of using the Greek mainland, but most of all the Greek harbours in case of a war with Italy, while they could foresee Italian attempts to neutralise Greece through such a pact. That is why they instructed Metaxas to avoid renewing the old pact but to consider signing a fresh agreement with Italy in more general terms which would allow Greece full liberty of action in case of a war between Italy and Britain and/or between the Balkan Entente and Italy. Therefore Metaxas, rather than reacting strongly against Britain limited himself to exchanging letters with the Italian Minister in Athens on 20th September 1939, concluding by this means, the new Greco-Italian Agreement. This agreement spoke of mutual withdrawal of troops from the Greco-Albanian border, the common desire for a policy of peace and tranquillity and the aspirations of both countries for the future evolution of Greco-Italian relations.

In this way, the cancellation of the previous Greco-Italian Pact of 1928, which was allowed to expire from the Greek side, showed a clear intervention of the British Government in the shaping of the Greek foreign policy. According to Panagiotis Pipinelis, this made the Italians suspicious that the Greeks had already made up their mind as to their position internationally.(121) Shortly, after the conclusion of the new Italo-Greek Agreement, the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces in Albania, General Alfredo Guzzoni, was replaced. His replacement was another step which Italy took towards the re-invigoration of Greco-Italian relations, since he had become a hostile figure to the Greeks.

General Carlo Geloso who replaced him was instructed by the Duce not to consider Greece as a target for Italy.(122) This new agreement threw a new light of hope that relations between the two countries would prosper and for the
moment it seemed that the conflict of October 1940 could have been avoided.

1k) Greece and Italy in the year 1940

The year 1940 was to become the beginning of a colossal struggle for the Greek nation. Italian hostility was manifested during the first months of 1940 with unfounded accusations from Italy against Greece that she had allowed British vessels in her territorial waters and supplied them in Greek harbours, while flights of Italian military aircraft over Greek territory put the Italian Minister in a difficult position vis-à-vis Greece since he was forced to receive the continuous complaints of the Greek Government. These violations of Greek air space were accidental according to the Italian Minister, but they caused considerable alarm to the Greek population and leaders who had declared strict neutrality.

In March 1940, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Greek Foreign Office was informed that Albanian irregular forces were ready to attack areas close to the Greek borders. To this information the Italian embassy answered that it was completely untrue.(123) In April 1940, however, the Greek diplomatic emissaries in Rome, Geneva and Sofia informed the Greek state that an Italian invasion of Corfu and Salonika was imminent.(124) Count Grazzi denied all these allegations pointing out that they must have emanated from British sources, since Britain mistrusted the Italo-Greek friendship. Metaxas replied that, on the contrary, Britain favoured a rapprochement between Greece and Italy and had expressed satisfaction over the exchange of letters in 1939.(125)

On 11th April, the former Minister of Public Works in Santi Quaranta spoke of particular territorial demands at the expense of Greece and Yugoslavia which included the area of Pindus. At the same time demonstrations favouring the
return of Ciamuria from Greece to Albania were planned by the Italians in Valona and Argyrokastron. (126)

On 30th April 1940 Count Ciano had a conversation with the Greek Minister in Rome, in which he assured him that Corfu was not in danger from Italy at all, and that Grazzi could convey that message to Metaxas to soothe his anxiety. On the other hand, Italian officials both in Italy and in Albania continued to spread "rumours" about a possible invasion of Greece and to appease the Albanians by telling them that very soon their "just" territorial desires against Greece and Yugoslavia were to be fulfilled.

In Italy, on 29th May 1940, Ciano spoke of the Albanian irredentists of Ciamuria and Kossovo, while on 1st June the newspapers *Il Popolo di Roma* and *La Stampa* (of Turin) published articles which referred to the use of Greek territorial waters by British ships and the absolute dependency of the poor Greek state on Britain. (127)

On 25th May the Greek Vice-Consul in Valona, Georgiades, informed the Greek Consul-General in Tirana that on 19th May there had been a demonstration in which the crowd shouted against Greece and Britain and called for the unification of Kossovo and Ciamuria with Albania. (128) Again on 7th June in Corfu, there had been a meeting in the Italian Consulate in which the people of Northern Epirus were invited to join the Italian Fascist Party and fight in favour of their so-called righteous cause, which was the return of Northern Epirus to Albania. The Albanian newspaper *Tomori*, said that, as a result of Italy's entry into the war, the Albanians now had the opportunity of claiming their national "rights" in Ciamuria and Kossovo through the creation of a greater Albania. At the same time, there was a rumour of the impending occupation of Ciamuria and Kossovo by the ever increasing number of Italian soldiers on Albanian soil. (129)

11) From the Italian entry into World War II until October 1940
Italian entry into the Second World War on 10th June 1940 increased Greek anxiety over the position that Italy was going to adopt concerning Greece and the Balkan peninsula. Metaxas was afraid. He was assured by the Italian Minister in Athens that Greece was not going to be attacked. Mussolini's public speech on 10th June regarding Italy's action and her posture towards the Balkans, Egypt and Switzerland seemed to ease, at least for the moment, the fears of Metaxas, but he was worried about the role of Yugoslavia and Turkey in the event that Greece was attacked by Italy.

Yugoslavia assured Metaxas that it would fight on the Greek side if Italy decided to invade Greece; but Metaxas was not so easily calmed down and even prayed to God to save Greece. (130) The British and the French were presented with a new situation by Italy's entry into the war. With Italy as their enemy, they would have welcomed a joint effort of the Balkan nations in support of the Allied cause, in order to balance the menace of Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean; but the Allies could not persuade Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey to come into the war on the Allied side, since Italy had not directly attacked these nations, but most of all because these Balkan states needed some degree (in Greece's case, a large degree) of military and economic assistance to lure them to the common effort which France and Britain could not possibly provide at the time.

But the Italian provocations and plans started to take shape quickly enough. On 18th June 1940 Filippo Anfuso, Director of Ciano's private office and representing him, called the Greek Minister in Rome, John Politis, and informed him that the Italian Admiralty had information that a strong British naval force of one aircraft-carrier and an unspecified number of destroyers and cruisers had remained in Crete for more than the 24 hours which the international regulations allowed. Greece rejected that accusation and the Italian
Ministry for Foreign Affairs seemed to accept the Greek denial. (131)

The next day the Italian review *Conquisto d’Impero* published a map of the Italian Empire which included Corfu, Crete and Cyprus. (132) On 24th June, Anfuso once more summoned Politis and, in an angry tone, complained to him that the Greek Ambassador to Ankara was operating against the Axis and that that was an open violation of the Greek neutrality. Anfuso demanded his immediate recall from Ankara, but it did not take place. (133)

On 3rd July 1940, Ciano had a meeting with Politis in which he made the outright accusation that according to the Governor of the Dodecanese, de Vecchi, British ships and planes had taken refuge in Greece. Ciano told Politis that on 13th June an Italian submarine was attacked on surface by British planes near the island of Lefkada. On 28th June another Italian submarine was attacked by planes and destroyers near Zante. The next day a third Italian submarine was attacked and possibly sunk by aircraft and destroyers coming from Zante. Finally, in the next two days, British destroyers were allegedly off Melos. Ciano warned Politis that if this Greek attitude of favourable non-belligerency towards Britain did not stop immediately, the Duce was willing to take action against Greece. (134) Of course Greece denied all these unfounded allegations. A few days later the Italian threats and provocations turned into acts of war.

On 12th July three Italian bombers fired at the Greek naval vessel *Orion*, west of Crete, while, later on, the destroyer *Hydra* was also attacked when it received a signal to come to *Orion*’s aid. Both ships came out unharmed. On 30th July another Italian plane coming from the direction of the Dodecanese dropped four bombs on two Greek destroyers and on two submarines which were anchored in Nafpaktos harbour. All the four bombs failed to hit their target. (135) On 2nd August a similar air attack took place against the
Greek coast guard vessel A6, which fortunately was unsuccessful as well.

On 3rd August, Ciano summoned the Greek Minister in Rome and demanded that Skarpas, the Greek Consul in Trieste be recalled immediately for being incurably anti-Italian. This time the Consul was recalled. Seven days later, on 11th August Ciano wrote in his diary that the Duce was considering an act of force against the Greeks as well as planning to occupy Ciamuria with a surprise attack at the end of September 1940. One day later, Francesco Jacomoni, the Italian Minister in Tirana, and General Victorio Prasca, the new Commander-in-Chief of the Italian troops there, agreed with Ciano that an action was possible and even easy against Greece, provided that it took place at once. They decided that if Corfu and Ciamuria fell quickly, they would not ask for more; but if resistance was met, they would go to the limit.

Due to all the military violations of the Greek airspace by Italian warplanes and the obvious signs of the change of the Italian foreign policy against Greece, on 7th August General Metaxas had a conversation with Count Grazzi during which he complained of the unreasonable hostility and offensive attitude of the Italian leaders. Metaxas explained to the Italian Minister that the Italian attacks on Greek ships and the continuous violations of Greek airspace were signs of Italian direct aggressiveness. He reaffirmed to Grazzi that Greek neutrality was not non-belligerent in favour of Britain and asked that the Italian authorities were informed of Greece's honest and friendly attitude towards Italy. Count Grazzi, on his turn, tried to defend his government by stating that their feelings were still friendly towards their neighbours. He was unable, however, to explain the reasons for the accusations and the violations made by Italy, but he was sure that both the Duce and the Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, felt amicably towards Metaxas and his country.
As for the unfounded accusations made so bluntly by the Italian authorities regarding the use of Greek harbours and even of the Greek flag(139) by British warships, the Italian Minister in Athens, Count Grazzi wrote clearly and categorically in his memoirs that no British naval or air base was created in Greece before the outbreak of the Italo-Greek conflict on 28th October 1940. Under no circumstances would the Greek leader have supplied or maintained British forces in Greece prior to 28th October 1940; otherwise, one of the many diplomatic and military delegations of the Axis in Greece would have discovered such a breach of strict neutrality.(140)

On the other hand, however, we must draw attention to the testimony of Admiral Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, in his memoirs. According to him, British ships occasionally resorted to Greek anchorages and used them for refuelling. Specifically, Cunningham states that British submarines were passing through Aegean to the Dardanelles and destroyers were patrolling the Kithera passage.(141) The Italians had discovered and bombed the ships, while according to him Greece had protested against that British violation of Greek neutrality and had demanded immediate withdrawal.(142) Certainly, Cunningham does not indicate that British naval units entered Greek waters with the knowledge or the approval of the Greek Government. On 11th August, the official Fascist Italian news agency, Stefani, announced that the so-called Albanian patriot Daut Hodja had been brutally assassinated and decapitated by a gang of Greeks on the orders of the Greek Government. He had been, according to Stefani, a true fighter who had worked for the return of Ciamuria to Albania and the liberation of persecuted Albanian people from Greece. The Athenian agency immediately countered that allegation by stating the truth, that Daut Hodja was not an Albanian patriot but a common thief and murderer who had been convicted innumerable
times in Greece for different crimes and who had been killed by Albanians. (143)

From that day onwards, there were ceaseless Italian press and radio attacks on Greece and on the Greek Monarch. Among other accusations against the King of Greece, was that he was more pro-British than pro-Greek and that Greece was following clearly a pro-British policy. The Greek Government was also attacked for allegedly suppressing the Albanians of Northern Epirus by the use of brigands who terrorised the people. Greece was accused of planning and ordering the murder of other Albanians as well. On 12th August Metaxas wrote in his diary: "my decision is to fight until the end. Some Ministers and Papagos are hesitants about that." (144)

Finally, on 14th August, the Italian press attack reached its highest point when it blamed Greece for being openly anti-Italian and demanded some kind of propitiation in the form of territorial re-adjustments in favour of Albania and Italy. (145) Finally, the most atrocious of the Italian hostile actions was committed on 15th August 1940, during the feast of the Dormition, when an Italian submarine launched a torpedo attack and sank the Greek light cruiser Helle as it lay at anchor at Tinos. The Italians claimed at once that it was a British action designed to place the blame on the Italians and in this way disturb Greco-Italian relations. (146) The Greeks discovered the identity of the submarine (the Delfino) from the remnants of the torpedoes but refrained from making it public, for fear of reprisals from the Greek population on the Italians in Greece as well as not to spark any other Italian action of the same style.

Metaxas had been alarmed by that continuous and increasingly offensive anti-Hellenic attitude of the Italians towards Greece and on 13th August 1940 had informed all Royal legations that the sudden change of Italian policy might have in view either full-scale action against Greece or the occupation of Ciamuria only. Whichever it might be, he informed the Royal legations that the decision of the Royal
Government to resist "remained unshaken." (147) That same day, Metaxas saw the German Minister and informed him of his continuous anxiety over an Italian intervention which the Greek Premier considered as imminent and pleaded with him to intervene in Berlin, to ask that Germany do what it could to restrain the unbearable Italian pressure on Greece. The German Minister told Metaxas that the Greek state had been orientated towards Britain, and it would be difficult for the Axis to view Greece differently unless a complete re-orientation took place. Metaxas replied that he himself was on Germany’s side but that since Greece was a Mediterranean country she could not afford to ally herself with the Axis because Britain had control of the Eastern Mediterranean. He also stated to the German diplomat that Greece was determined to fight Italy if the latter decided to attack her. (148)

Then the German Minister communicated his discussion with Metaxas to Grazzi and the latter to Rome. Mussolini was offended because Metaxas has said that Britain had control of the Mediterranean and decided to prove to the Greeks who was actually in control of the Mare Nostrum and that, that is why he ordered the torpedoing of Helle. On the contrary Ciano wrote in his diary, that the operation against the Greek vessel was ordered by the ‘intemperance’ de Vecchi while Mussolini wanted to settle this issue peacefully. (149)

Speaking of sides, Greece not only had kept an unblemished neutrality; if it did violate its neutrality at all, it was in favour of the Axis. At the end of June 1940, the Greek Chief of the Naval Staff Rear-Admiral Alexander Sakellariou called the Italian Naval Attaché in Athens and informed him of the presence of four British warships in Greek waters, which had been ordered by the Greeks to leave immediately. Admiral Sakellariou commented that “you [the Attaché] can use this information as you like.” It can be easily understood how useful such information could be to the Italians, especially if
Sakellariou had pointed out the exact position of the British naval units in the Greek waters. (150)

Italy maintained undiminished her political attack on Greece for the whole of August while the violations of Greek airspace and press and radio attacks increased. In certain articles in Italian newspapers, Italy claimed Corfu and Albania Ciamuria, while the small Albanian minority in Greece was represented as constantly suppressed by the Greeks. Italy accused Greece of planning along with Britain to occupy Albania and to allow the use of Corfu and Crete by British forces. At the same time, according to Italy, Greece attempted to dilute that small minority in Northern Epirus. (151)

It seems, however, that the personal plea of Metaxas to the German Minister in Athens had not been in vain. For the time being, Germany had intervened to save Greece. (152) Ciano wrote in his diary that on 17th August 1940 and again on the 22nd of the same month, Germany had intervened directly and had pressed Italy to abandon any plan against Greece or Yugoslavia. "It is a complete order to halt all along the line. That an eventual action against Greece is not at all welcome in Berlin." "It appears that Germany had renewed their pressure, even on our headquarters, in this sense." (153) On 28th August Metaxas wrote in his diary: "They [the Germans] saved us [Greeks] from Italy for the second time. I will not kneel before the Italians." On 29th August Metaxas wrote again in the diary "from Rome we are assured this was the last time Hitler saved us." (154)

Further evidence of Hitler's intervention comes from the Greek White Book. On 20th August 1940 the Greek Minister Politis telegraphed to Athens that Germany had intervened in Rome and signified that peace should remain in the Balkans. Though the Mediterranean was recognized as an Italian sphere of influence, a possible Greco-Italian conflict would stir up the Balkans, cause Bulgaria and Turkey to intervene and muddle up the whole situation. Thus Germany demanded
from Italy that the Greco-Italian dispute should be solved diplomatically. On 24th September also, Berlin reaffirmed its strict attitude concerning the Italian suggestions about possible military operations in the Balkans for the "liquidation of the other Balkan problems, including the Albanian question and that of British influence in Greece."(155) Metaxas was upset with the Greek Minister in Berlin for mishandling the Greek affairs. He believed that Alexander Rangaves had not defended Greek rights as he should have done, and showed signs of faint-heartedness.(156) At 02:00 on one of these critical days of extreme pressure on Metaxas, he angrily shouted at Rangaves on the phone, "Mr. Rangaves, visit again Ribbentrop and inform him, on my behalf, that Greece will fight against anyone who attacks her".(157)

On 26th August 1940, Joachim von Ribbentrop met Alexander Rangaves and told him that Germany saw Greece as a country which had gone over to Britain. He also emphasized to the Greek Minister that the Mediterranean was an Italian sphere of influence and that the Greeks had better make contact with the Italians directly and establish friendly relations with them, without the involvement of Germany.(158) While this antagonistic game was going on between Greece, Italy, Great Britain and Germany, Metaxas, concerned at the idea of a possible future Italian hostile move against Greece, which the Germans would not or could not stop, made a most earnest inquiry, through the British Minister in Greece, as to what help Greece could expect from Great Britain, if attacked by Italy.(159)

The reply to Metaxas' inquiry was a vague one. The British would support Greece with all their power but without indicating the extent, the nature or the timing of their assistance to Greece.

"In the event of an Italian attack on Greece our [Britain's] assistance must be mainly directed towards knocking Italy
out of the war.”(160) “Italy must if possible be prevented from achieving a bloodless victory over Greece. If she is resolved to obtain control of Greece she ought to have to fight for it and not to obtain it by bluff and empty threat. If her bluff is called she may withdraw from her present position and this would constitute a great moral victory for Greece from which we would benefit also. If, on the other hand, Italy persists to the point where she cannot draw back it will be to our advantage that she should get involved in all the uncertainties and complications of a Balkan campaign, especially at this time when she appears to be planning an attack on Egypt.”(161)

On the other hand, Britain did not want to commit herself explicitly to assisting Greece in case of war with Italy. If Italy was forced to fight she would have to engage a large amount of troops in Albania and Greece, troops that would otherwise have been sent to North Africa to fight against the British forces defending Egypt and the vital Suez Canal. In September 1940, the two Axis partners agreed that Greece was a problem to be dealt at the peace table. That was Mussolini’s line to the German delegation when they met the Duce in Rome on 19th September 1940.(162) It was more or less the same answer given to the German Government about Italian intentions regarding Greece approximately a month before: that Italian actions were just precautionary measures and the Italians would turn to military action only if Britain decided to occupy Greek bases.(163)

Germany did not want to see any expansion of the war to the south-east corner of the European continent, at least for the time being. General Rohl who had visited Albania, stated that Germany was fighting a war against England and did not wish any enlargement of the conflict in other areas of Europe without a serious reason.(164) Germany desired that the situation there [in Greece] should remain quiet. As his personal opinion the Foreign Minister had added that Italy ought to consider whether certain gains might not be cancelled out if England were to acquire a foothold in Greece
under one pretext or another and, for instance established bases there for air attacks". (165)

On 28th August 1940, Palairet had a second meeting with Metaxas in which he announced to Metaxas the decision of Britain to assist Greece. A vague reply, as we have already seen. Metaxas wrote in his diary that day that Palairet had "determined the assistance towards Greece. Fine - the uncertainty has ended. Thank God". (166) However the uncertainty had not ended. Britain had declared her wish to aid Greece in case of a military crisis, but until that wish materialised, Metaxas should not have rested so easily.

September and the first days of October passed without any serious deterioration of the already tense Greco-Italian relations, though the Italian press continued its allegations against Greece. At the same time all the information from Greek diplomatic circles in Rome, as well as in other European cities, spoke of Italy's forces in Albania moving towards the Greco-Albanian frontier. (167)

In the meantime violations of Greek neutrality by Italian planes continued and during the third week of October the Italian concentrations near the Greek borders mounted heavily. Metaxas was nervous and wanted to mobilise but he did not want to give Italy any reason that would "justify" and speed up an Italian attack on Greece. (168).

During these critical days of late August and early September 1940, Papagos was pressing the government to allow the mobilisation of forces in Epirus and Macedonia as well as of the 1 Infantry Division in Kalabaka. Metaxas was against such a mobilisation for the reason explained above. However Papagos' pressure must have been so great that one evening Metaxas, in the presence of Papagos, telephoned to Rangaves in Berlin and requested from him, to find out whether Italian ambitions had the backing of Berlin. Rangaves called back later and informed the Premier that according to a very reliable source, close to Hitler, the latter
would never agree to an Italian attack on Greece, but Greece also should not give a pretext for one. Metaxas turned down Papagos's plea for partial mobilisation. Papagos however, according to his son, Leonidas Papagos proceeded to a secret mobilisation of some units without the knowledge of Metaxas. (169)

Metaxas also informed Palairiet that the British should not take any step to aid Greece militarily until hostilities had begun. (170) On 12th October, following the German despatch of anti-aircraft units to the oilfields of Rumania, Mussolini, outraged by his partner's move without consulting him, finalised his decision to invade Greece and to pay his partner back in his own coin. On 15th October, Mussolini had a meeting at the Palazzo Venezia to conclude the details of the operation against Greece. (171)

Approximately two months before, on 21st August, Mussolini had written a letter to Hitler in which, among other things, he stated that all Greek ports were bases against Italy and that there was no doubt of Greece's continuous and verified complicity with Britain. But Mussolini declared that "I intend to direct the Italian military effort towards Egypt and not in this direction [Greece]." (172) On 19th September 1940, during the meeting of the Duce with Ribbentrop in Rome, he explicitly told Ribbentrop that "the Greeks are to Italy what the Norwegians were to Germany. For us, too, it is therefore necessary to take steps to liquidate Greece". However, Ciano wrote that "the Duce agrees with Ribbentrop that the principal aim is to defeat England." (173)

And even on the day of the Brenner meeting between the two dictators, on 4th October 1940, just 24 days before the Italian invasion of Greece, the British Consul in Geneva was informed by his Greek colleague that the Greek Minister in Berlin had received official assurances that no action against Greece was to be contemplated by the Axis powers. (174) On 13th October the Greek Ambassador to Budapest informed
the Greek Government that a very reliable source stated that an Italian attack on Greece was imminent. On 25th October 1940 the Greek Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed that in Germany a map had been published showing Salonika, Eastern Thrace and Istanbul in Bulgaria and Epirus in Italy. On 27th October 1940, the Stefani news agency announced that an attack had been made with bombs against the Italian Port Authority of Santi Quaranta and that the previous day an armed Greek band had attacked Italian posts in the Koritsa sector. That was the incident that was fabricated by Ciano in order to provide Italy with a pretext to attack Greece two days later.

Both the British and the Greeks had numerous warnings of the imminent Italian attack on Greece. From the beginning of October 1940, the Foreign Office and its Greek counterpart had been receiving information from their diplomatic missions indicating that a possible Italian move against Greece should be expected any moment. However, initially the British thought that the Italians were trying to disorientate British intelligence, and thus divert British attention from North Africa, which the British thought it was the basic Italian front. But as the Italian military build up increased in Albania and the information that poured into London gathered, the British began to realise that the Italian attack on Greece was more than a strategic deception. On 23rd October Politis telegraphed to Greece that the Italian attack would be launched between the 25th and 28th of October. On 25th October, the Greek Ambassador in Berne, Psaroudas informed the Royal Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs that he had information from a source in Berlin that the attack on Greece was a matter of days only. From Tirana the news that reached the Greek capital was that great activity was observed in the Italian armed forces, civilian traffic and telegraphic communication were difficult and that an Italian move was highly suspected.
The Foreign Office was informed from its embassy in Belgrade that Bulgaria and Italy would attack Greece very soon. Just six days before the Italian attack, the British embassy in Washington sent a cable to London, stating that according to sources in Rome Mussolini had ordered the attack to commence on 25th October, though Badoglio argued that such a move would provide the British with a pretext to seize bases in Greece. Accordingly, the Italian fleet was to sail on 24th October in order to attack Corfu while troops, supplies and ships were gathered in Bari, Taranto and Brindisi harbours. The British were even able to predict the exact day of the attack, few hours before it actually began. More details on the intelligence aspect of the Greek entry into the Second World War and the German attack on Greece in April 1941 can be obtained from F.H. Hinsley’s series on British Intelligence in the Second World War volume I.

Metaxas once more assured the British that he was ready to meet any attack whenever it came, while the Chiefs of Staff in London believed that the Greek resistance would crack even with a light air attack on the cities. Metaxas was uneasy at the news that reached Athens and through each day that passed from the beginning of October, when the first warning came, until early on 28th October when he was handed the infamous ultimatum, he was a frustrated and stressed man hoping to avoid what he almost knew would be unavoidable. Mussolini chose to deliver his ultimatum on 28th October 1940, thinking of his anniversary of the victorious march in Rome. He forgot that this day was also the anniversary of the humiliating defeat of the Italian army at Caporetto in 1917 during the First World War.

On 29th October, just one day after the Italian attack had commenced, Reginald Hoare, British Minister in Bucharest, sent a cable to London, which read that neither the Italian nor the German legation there knew of the Italian attack on Greece. Palairret, the same day, informed Foreign Office that
the indications in Athens showed that the Italian attack was undertaken without German consent.
Chapter 2
The Italian Attack on Greece 1940

2a) The Decision to Invade

In the previous chapter we have seen the mounting of the tension between Greece and Italy, up to the handing of the ultimatum. In the first section of this chapter we will investigate the reasons which made Mussolini attack Greece. The reasons for it are many and complicated. It is partly due to Mussolini's complicated and blurred personality. Anyway, he was the only person capable and unfortunately powerful enough as well, to take such a decision hastily and naively, without being confronted openly by anyone else. Mussolini had been preparing for an attack against Yugoslavia since April 1940, when he had given to his Army Chief of Staff, Field Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, the green light to proceed with the assembly of forces. Ciano had spoken to Hitler on 7th July 1940 about the prospect of Italy occupying Greece due to the fear of a British landing in Corfu to use Greek territorial waters to attack Italian shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean. That was why Italy had to occupy the Ionian islands. Hitler did not object, openly at least, to any Italian operations to prevent a British base in Greece. In this meeting with Hitler, Ciano spoke of Yugoslavia's insincerity, implying Yugoslavia's hostile attitude to the Axis and especially Italy. Hitler assured Ciano that Yugoslavia would be liquidated in a manner favourable to Italy but only when the situation appeared to be propitious. In the same way Hitler told Ciano that the Adriatic and the Mediterranean were a purely Italian matter in which Germany would not interfere. (3)

Italy hoped to be able to grasp the opportunity to tackle Yugoslavia and reduce it to a mere satellite of Italy. But Hitler was not willing to stir up the Balkans into a fruitless war which would have diverted considerable German forces
to the area, thus forcing the Axis to fight on two fronts simultaneously.

Moreover Yugoslavia supplied one third of Germany's demand for bauxite for the production of aluminium, urgently needed for the construction of aeroplanes, while her export of tin to Germany was enough to satisfy almost all of Germany's requirements and she was an important supplier of copper, lead and hemp. Such an important source of raw materials was very significant to Hitler. He was afraid that if Italy laid hands on Yugoslavia, it was highly possible that Hungary would take the opportunity to fall on Rumania, since it would not be afraid of Yugoslavia. At the same time Russia might possibly join forces with Bulgaria and drive down to the Dardanelles. Germany was importing oil from Rumania at a rate of 140,000 tons a month, which could have been greatly endangered if Rumania were occupied by Hungary with the consent of Russia.

That is why Hitler put an outright veto, until the war against Britain was won, on Mussolini's plan to attack Yugoslavia and stir up the Balkans. To this veto, Mussolini did not object, not openly at least. The Duce did not forget that the Mediterranean was an Italian sphere of influence and that Germany had recognized this. However, he was upset by the information he had about the continuous use of the Greek waters and harbours by British ships which attacked Italian ships in the Eastern Mediterranean. This was the best reason he could give Germany to justify the war against Greece.

The Italians were also aware of the Germans' discovery of certain documents when they invaded France. In June 1940, the Germans had found the so-called Charite Papers inside a railway carriage used by the French Commander-in-Chief General Maurice Gamelin as his mobile headquarters. Some of these documents dealt with Greece revealing that in October and November 1939 she contacted France and Great Britain seeking reinforcement of her war preparedness and military
equipment from these two countries in the light of her insecurity caused by the Italian landing in Albania and of the possible expansion of the war in the rest of Europe too. (7)

According to Italian statements these papers incriminated Greece for not following a strict neutrality as she had declared, but siding with the Allies. However, as the Italian Minister in Athens believed, these papers were not evidence of an attempt by Greece to abandon its strict neutrality in favour of the Allies, as the Italians, and later on the Germans, claimed in false attempts to justify their attack on Greece. (8) It was merely an effort of Greece to safeguard its interests better, by forming a close defensive alliance, if possible, with Britain and France, in order to be prepared to meet an aggressor. (9) Indeed Greece's perception of a need for extra security was caused by the Italian military build up in Albania, and Greece's actions did not in any case pose any threat to the Axis, as the Italians wanted to make the Germans believe in order to give a just cause for their move into Greece. (10)

But neither the accusations that Greece abandoned its neutrality in favour of the Allies, according to the Charite Papers, nor those accusations described in chapter 1, were the actual reasons that made Italy attack Greece. All these accusations were simply pretexts. More than any real danger that Greece might have been to the Axis, if she had allied herself with the Anglo-French camp, the most decisive and compelling reason for Italy to invade Greece was Mussolini's jealousy of Hitler's easy and triumphant victories in the west. (11) Mussolini needed an easy prey for himself in order to boost his popularity in Italy and within the Fascist Party and to show his compatriots, as well as his partner, that Italy too was capable of subduing a country.

To that we can add the fact that Greece did have military significance for Italy. The Adriatic Sea could be completely closed if Italy could post its forces, even in limited strength,
on the west coast at Brindisi and on the east in Valona. (12) In that sense, the *Mare Nostrum* that Mussolini hoped to create could have finally started to materialise. It is important to add that, for Italy, the invasion of Greece was a pre-emptive strike against the British and the possibility of their establishing themselves in that country. In addition to that, it was an effort by Italy to create bases on mainland and island Greece from which she could attack the possessions of Britain in the Eastern Mediterranean, thus creating her own peripheral strategy and achieving alignments favourable to her. (13) That is the way the *Duce* presented his attack on Greece to Hitler, as a prospective campaign of a double assault on Britain’s position in the Eastern Mediterranean by the simultaneous capture of Mersa Matruh and the domination of the Aegean Sea. (14) Of course Mussolini did not mention to Hitler anything about his jealousy as a factor in his invasion of Greece.

Mussolini had been indecisive about whether and when to attack Greece; but suddenly, early in October 1940, he finalised his decision to do so. But the reason behind this abrupt action was simply the German move into Rumania. Mussolini used the German despatch of anti-aircraft forces in Rumania as a pretext, to proceed with the attack on Greece which he knew that Germany and some of his own staff, did not welcome or approve. The *Duce* decided to re-establish the equilibrium between Italy and Germany and surprise his partner with a *fait accompli*, which was the attack on Greece. In this way Hitler would be paid back in his own coin. (15) For Mussolini it was almost unethical and treacherous for Hitler to send his forces, even token ones, into Rumania, without informing Mussolini or asking him to participate with Italy’s troops. Up to October 1940 when he finalised his decision on the Greek issue, Mussolini had created three or four different plans for the invasion of the Balkans (Yugoslavia and Greece) which were “adopted and discarded according to his changing whims.” (16)
According to Martin van Creveld, not only was Yugoslavia the Forbidden Fruit which the Germans wanted to have exclusively for themselves, but also in order to invade Yugoslavia, assuming that the Germans allowed him to do so, Mussolini would probably need the military assistance of Germany; since Yugoslavia possessed a population of 16 million, even if not a homogeneous nation with Croatic irredentistic claims whereas Greece had only 8 million. (17) In addition, the Yugoslav army was far larger in size, better equipped and supported than the Greek. Greece, therefore, became the compromise that Mussolini wanted, thinking that the "liquidation of Greece would be profitable and easy". (18) For Mussolini Greece was going to be a simple march to Athens. In this way not only would the Duce have shown Hitler that he was capable of occupying a country by using his own country's military forces alone, but most of all, would have increased his esteem within Italy and the Fascist regime. Last but not least, the Duce would have shown Hitler the Italian iron fist.

2b) The Delphic German Attitude

Let us now investigate whether the Germans had any real knowledge of the Italian action that was contemplated and anticipated against Greece. Ciano has a very interesting entry in his diary for 27th October 1940. He wrote: "Action is expected at any moment. And yet the four diplomats, German, Japanese, Spanish and Hungarian, to whom I handed the text of the ultimatum to Greece, were rather surprised." (19) However evidence that Hitler was fairly aware of the Italian invasion against Greece, and of its timing, come from Germany's diplomatic emissaries in Italy.

The German Ambassador to Rome, Hans Georg von Mackensen, wrote in a cable on 24th of October 1940 to the German Foreign Ministry, that though the official Italian
Government had not informed him of any Italian plans against Greece, reliable sources assured him that the attack on Greece would begin in a matter of days. Similarly, the German Chargé d' Affaires in Rome Otto von Bismarck telegraphed to his country's Foreign Ministry, that almost twelve hours before Ciano had informed him of the delivery of the Italian ultimatum to Metaxas, and of the beginning of the hostilities at 06:00 on the morning of 28th October. That message was also sent to the special train of the Foreign Minister which was on its way to Florence, carrying Hitler. (20) John Koliopoulos in his book Greece and the British Connection 1935-1941 writes that Hitler was not informed only vaguely of Italy's plan to occupy Greece, as he later claimed, and that he had all the time he needed to delay Mussolini. (21)

Ernst von Weizsacker, the Permanent Secretary of the Reich's Foreign Affairs Ministry wrote in his memoirs: "On the German side it was said that the Italian Government had sprung this affair [the Italian attack on Greece] on us without a warning. But this is not quite true. We had for long been able to sense what was in the wind as far as Italian intentions were concerned." (22) This theory, that Hitler and the rest of the German High Command had been indirectly informed of what was going on with the Italian plan to invade Greece and that the Germans had ample time either to delay, postpone or even to stop altogether the Italian hostile move into Greece is held by other writers too, such as Elizabeth Wiskemann, Martin van Creveld and Charles Cruickshank. Cruickshank writes that six hours before the Italian ultimatum was shown to the Greeks, Ciano had informed the German Chargé d' Affaires of Mussolini's plan to attack Greece. Surely von Bismarck must have informed Berlin. (23) What seems strange, however, is the way Hitler reacted as information poured in, of the imminent danger of an Italian attack on Greece.
As we have seen in chapter 1, Hitler had twice in the past, in August 1940, blocked the Italian aspirations for expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean. Why in October did Hitler "allow", more accurately - not restrain, the Italian attack on Greece, when he thought that it would create more problems for the Axis than it would solve? The answer to this simple question is not an easy one; there is no one answer, but a combination of reasons. Though Mussolini had tried to hide from his partner the real aims of his next strike, van Creveld describes how Hitler "had been bombarded by a hail of reports concerning the imminent action, some of them giving precise dates. There was scarcely a German official anywhere near Italy who did not sound the alarm. Ritter and Ribbentrop, Weizsacker and Keitel, had called his attention to the news. He had even (supposedly) redirected his train to meet Mussolini and stop him. And now he was shouting he knew nothing of the entire business and blaming his subordinates. What was he up to?." (24)

Ciano wrote in his diary on 22nd October that Mussolini had drafted a letter to Hitler dated 19th October speaking of the general situation and his intention to settle the problem with Greece militarily. But Mussolini deliberately abstained from writing the truth about the Italian action against Greece which was to commence eight days later, just because the Germans could have tried to halt the Italians once more. "Many indications lead us to believe that in Berlin they are not very enthusiastic about our going to Athens". (25)

One of the reasons that Hitler ignored or disregarded all the reports he had about the Italian attack on Greece was that he did not believe that Mussolini was going to put into action his plan for the conquest of Greece. After all, Mussolini had many times changed his mind about the invasion of Greece, so how could Hitler have known with certainty that Mussolini would carry out his plan? This is a
probable hypothesis as to why Hitler had not exerted himself to block the strategic plan of his Axis ally. (26) On the other hand, Hitler had regarded the Mediterranean as an Italian sphere of influence and he had been silent when he was on numerous occasions informed about the prospective Italian invasion of Greece. The reason was perhaps that Hitler believed that though the Mediterranean belonged to the Italians, they would not for the time being actually try to control it militarily. (27)

Another factor that could have played a significant part in Hitler's decision not to block Mussolini's plan from the start, was that he was fondly hoping that Germany's two previous vetos in August 1940, would have been sufficient to keep Mussolini from trying again to put his plan into action. As Charles Cruickshank argues in his book Greece 1940-1941 Hitler probably hoped to continue to restrain Mussolini, in spite of the alarming reports he had been receiving for along time. Hitler made an error of judgement when he believed that his meeting in Florence on 28th October with Mussolini would have saved the day for the Axis and Germany. (28) Hitler had arrived in Florence too late to avert Mussolini's blunder into Greece, though Hitler had urgently pressed for that meeting - as if he had sensed the coming danger - in which he hoped finally to restrain Mussolini's offensive spirit.

In one of the paragraphs of Hitler's letter to Mussolini dated 20th November 1940, the Chancellor mentioned that his intention in coming to Florence, had been to tell Mussolini not to invade Greece at that time but to postpone the invasion to a better time. Hitler wished first to see the outcome of the American elections (5th November 1940). But most of all, Hitler did not want to see any operation in the Balkans before the occupation of Crete had taken place for which he offered Mussolini Germany's airborne and parachute forces. (29).
In other words, Hitler hoped for two things: first to block Mussolini's ambitions against Greece. Alternatively, if he was not able to do that once and for all, then to persuade Mussolini to postpone the invasion of Greece until Crete was occupied by Italian and German forces together. In this way, Hitler would have secured the island of Crete, which, in British hands, could have been a base for British long range bombers to attack the Ploesti oil-fields in Rumania. If Hitler had managed to control Crete, (the most strategic part of Greece, from which he could have leap-frogged on to British North Africa and the Middle East) then he might have possibly allowed the Italians to invade the mainland of Greece.

The last hypothesis, is the most interesting of all, as to why Hitler tended to "ignore or disregard" the valuable information he had about the possible Italian action against Greece. This hypothesis is that he hoped that the Italian invasion of Greece would become another easy victory for the Axis from which, apart from Italy benefiting directly, Germany would benefit indirectly by obtaining bases in mainland and island Greece from which to attack the British and their possessions in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. Hitler did not believe, any more than anyone else, that a possible Italo-Greek conflict would escalate into a large scale war; and, even if it did, Hitler was pretty sure that Greece would not be able to offer a prolonged and successful resistance against the might of Italian military power. Thus, the invasion of Greece would have seemed to Hitler not much to worry about. Why stop it, if the benefits exceeded the costs and the costs were not even Germany's but only Italy's? That is perhaps why he restrained his anger at Mussolini when he reached Florence, in sharp contradiction with his fury on the train, because Hitler hoped that sooner or later Greece would have fallen under the Italians and that the whole invasion would be a matter of days, or weeks. Why ruin his relations with Italy.
and clash with Mussolini over a huge military mistake but one which would be settled right after?.

What is more, Italian action in Greece, even if it was badly timed, had the "undisputed" prospect of a rapid and easy victory for the Italians, which served the interest of Germany and of her peripheral strategy. Lieutenant-General Alfred Jodl and Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, the architects of the German peripheral strategy, hoped that there was a possibility of knocking out Britain by occupying her vital possessions and colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean and on the North African coast. (33) Instead of a frontal attack on the British Isles which could have proved less possible to implement, this peripheral strategy was a German attempt to enter through the back door. To the above, we must add the assumption that the lightning attack on and occupation of Greece (which everyone expected), like the German victories in the west, could have served another very important purpose for the Axis. It would have frightened the rest of the Balkan nations (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey), which were quite valuable to Germany in terms of raw materials and military power into joining the Axis or, in the worst case analysis, into not joining the Allies. (34) In both cases, but particularly in the first, Germany would have gained considerable benefits.

Hitler could never have envisaged that Greece would offer such a stubborn and successful resistance to a Great Power such as Italy. And even if he had, he surely did not expect that it would last so long. Van Creveld in his book Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941, The Balkan Clue considers another hypothesis. That Hitler, by pretending to be ill-informed of the impending Italian attack on Greece, was trying to create an alibi for himself, in case Italy failed to accomplish its aims. (35) In other words, by closing his eyes and ears to all the warnings he had from his staff and his liaisons officers and from the German diplomatic corps abroad, Hitler was trying to excuse himself from giving the green light to the
Italian attack on Greece and the subsequent fiasco, as it turned out to be. That is why he displayed such anger and swore at his staff when he learnt of the Italian attack on Greece, just before he arrived in Florence. (36)

Hitler was accusing his German associates of "misinforming" him about the Italian plan. Actually there was no misinformation at all. On the contrary, he had more information than he could have asked for. But by throwing the blame on to his assistants - for not stopping the Italian invasion, on the grounds that he was unaware or only vaguely aware of it - he very easily indeed absolved himself of responsibility for the possible Italian fiasco in Greece. He was right. The Italians made a huge mistake by attacking Greece and Hitler, as an excellent actor, put up a show, to manifest publicly his lack of knowledge of the Italian plans and therefore his inability to restrain his junior partner. (37)

Charles Cruickshank adds something important to the above hypothesis. Either Hitler has deceived his assistants on the train to Florence, by a masterful performance to show that he was angry at them for not informing him adequately about the Italian move on Greece, or he was acting when he met Mussolini cordially in Florence the same day the Italian attack on Greece was made. In either case Hitler used his acting capabilities: in the first case to protect his image and Germany's one, from the blame that he allowed Mussolini to attack Greece unprepared and to fail, as it turned and in the second case, not to show his partner his anger at Mussolini's gross blunder which upset the Axis plans in the Balkans. However it is obvious in either case that he was aware of the Italian plans to attack Greece, even if not precisely or in detail. (38)

Whatever the reasons might be for not stopping Mussolini or persuading him to call off or even postpone the Italian invasion in October 1940, Hitler was drawn directly or indirectly into a major blunder, to which he further
contributed later on himself (partly in order to assist his ally to complete the occupation of Greece) and which he came to wish had never happened at all.

2c) The Italian "Unpreparatory" Period

It is beyond any doubt nowadays to that the Italian attack on Greece was not just an unprepared military operation but a gigantic fiasco which entailed many repercussions and problems, on the Italian and German side. The Italian war plan for the invasion of Greece that was considered by the Italian General Staff, the so-called Emergenza G depended mostly on theoretical assumptions rather than actual military facts. First of all, Ciano hoped to create a war with Greece because "Greece was a small country and could be easily subdued". (39) To that assumption one should add the common belief within the Italian political and partly military leadership that the Greeks were not going to fight, contrary to the repeated reports of the Italian legation in Athens which stressed that the Greeks were united and they were going to resist any Italian attack whatsoever. Metaxas himself had made that crystal clear to the Italian Minister in Athens. But Rome tended to disregard the reports of Grazzi, partly because it received other reports, such as those from de Vecchi which tended to grossly underestimate the Greek fighting spirit, and partly because the Italian General Staff was too selfish and arrogant to accept Grazzi's reports as more accurate than theirs. During the notorious meeting at the Palazzo Venezia on 15th October 1940, in which the final aims and goals of the Italian plan were laid, Ciano assured the Duce that the Greek people were so disunited due to the dictatorship of General Metaxas that they were reluctant to fight at all. The Greek spirit was also very low and could easily be broken. (40)

Mussolini had also forgotten completely that while the Italians were preparing for the invasion of Greece, he had
personally ordered the demobilisation of his army and had "doubled" the number of the Italian divisions by halving the size of each of them, to make the Italian army seem larger. (41) Mussolini did not seem to have thought of the campaign in Greece in serious terms and he had naively believed that it would be a military promenade to Athens, (42) something of the same style and duration as the Italian advance in Abyssinia. The Italians did not think that Greece could put up any kind of stubborn resistance.

However the funniest of all the Italian assumptions about the "stroll to Athens" on which the Italian contingency plan was actually based, was the theory that thousands if not millions of Italian lire had been spent in order to bribe the Greek politicians and generals, and therefore the collapse of the Greek army and/or the Government was assured. The Italians hoped to destroy the Greek spirit within the army and the government. What actually happened was not at all what the Italians had in mind.

Mario Cervi claims that during the meeting on 15th October, there has been a vague discussion about Greek morale, but nothing to sustain the above argument. Cervi had discovered in Italian files that considerable sums have been allocated for the operation against Greece, but possibly for propaganda purposes. Visconti Prasca, the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces in Albania, denies knowledge of bribing. Additionally, Grazzi wrote that there had not been any serious politico-military preparation of any kind. If there had been an attempt to bribe the Greeks - though very remote - the money had been purloined by Fascists, who did not assist the Italian army at all. Denis Mack Smith shares the same opinion with Grazzi. (43)

Another prerequisite on which the Italian plan was based, was the "certainty" that the Albanian population and irregular troops were going to assist the Italians in their advance. Actually, in many cases, the reverse happened. Not
only did the majority of the Albanians not aid the Italian army at the time of the invasion, but most of them were keen to cooperate with the Greeks. (44) Once the Albanians discovered the fighting abilities of the Greeks, about which they had been deliberately told lies by the Italians, they deserted from the Italian army to join the Greek one. (45)

With the above fictitious advantages of the Italian invading army, one should contrast the opinion of Marshal Pietro Badoglio, Chief of Staff of the Italian Armed Forces, who, when asked by Mussolini on 14th October 1940 how many divisions the Italians would need for the occupation of Greece, answered at least 20 and said that a victory against the Greeks could not be anticipated in less than three months. (46) The Duce tended to ignore the reports that came from the Italian legation in Athens informing him of the state of the Greek army, its spirit, its defences, etc. (47) As the Italian Minister in Athens put it very explicitly, it was not only the Italian provocations and threats towards Greece, but most of all the sinking of the light cruiser Helle, which had achieved something unique, to unite all the Greeks around Metaxas. Even those who had been pro-Axis were instantly convinced that Greece faced a lethal enemy, Italy. All the opposition, even towards the regime of Metaxas, had ceased suddenly. The Italian Government had managed to rally all the Greeks beside their leader, in spite of the tremendous and deep political hatred that existed within Greek society. (48) Even though Metaxas's regime was oppressive and widely unpopular, still the Greeks rallied around him to beat the obvious enemy.

The Duce did not care to ask for the opinion of his naval and air force Chief of Staff, while Graziani, the Chief of the Army Staff, learned of the Italian invasion of Greece from the radio. (49) Mussolini had also been counting on Bulgarian participation and intervention, intending that Bulgaria by assisting in the attack would have the chance to gain a valuable outlet to the Aegean, as well as Macedonia.
that "belonged" to it. (50) But Bulgaria had very wisely rejected his proposal. King Boris feared the Turkish reaction to a Bulgarian participation in the invasion (51) invoking the Balkan Pact of 1934 which compelled Turkey to assist Greece, in such circumstances.

Ciano wrote in his diary on 17th October 1940 that the three Chiefs of the General Staff were against the campaign in Greece and the navy thought that it could not land forces in Preveza because the waters were too shallow. The same day, Badoglio spoke very seriously to Ciano about the Italian action against Greece. (52) No one took into consideration that the operation was to begin at the start of a rainy season with torrential storms, and in a very mountainous terrain. (53)

At the same time, nobody bothered to equip the Italian army with detailed maps and charts before the beginning of the operation, even though the war was to take place in a country with very few roads. Nor did anyone think to supply the Italian army with winter clothing, though everyone should have expected that the fighting will take place in winter temperatures and conditions. (54)

On 15th October, when Mussolini was informed by Ciano that Badoglio had spoken to him against the campaign, he was outraged by Badoglio's fears and informed Ciano that he would accept Badoglio's resignation if it was offered. But Badoglio, obviously afraid, did not mount any serious objection to the operation and did not repeat his fears to the Duce. Six days earlier Mussolini had declared that he would resign from being an Italian if anyone objected to the fighting in Greece. Ciano too, believed that the operation would be an easy one and useful. (55) Mussolini, obviously angry at Bulgaria's refusal to help, called King Boris a frightened King.

But the Duce did not take any personal interest in the preparation of the Italian invasion. He did not stop the demobilisation of the army because he feared that this would
have endangered the internal coherence of the Italian army. It is even possible that he had forgotten to do so. (56) The Chief of Air Force Staff, General Francesco Pricolo, learnt of the plan to invade Greece only on 15th October and he was not able in the short time to increase the number of Italian planes significantly. He thought that the timing of the Italian invasion was wrong in the context of the foreseeable weather conditions which would undoubtedly restrict any large deployment of the Italian air force in Albania, thus decreasing the greatest advantage that the Italians had over the Greeks. (57)

Even the German Military Attaché in Rome, Colonel Enno von Rintelen, believed that “Italian superiority was not sufficient to fulfil expectations of rapid success if the Greeks put up a serious resistance.” (58) While the Chiefs of Staffs required from Mussolini twice as many troops and an extra three months of preparation, he disregarded their advice. He was ready to make his ceremonial and glorious march to Athens. At the same time false intelligence reports seemed to assure him and some of his loyal generals of the Italian superiority in numbers and in morale. (59) According to Francesco Jacomoni, the Italian Minister (Governor) in Albania, the attack on Greece was awaited with impatience by the Albanians. The whole of the country was enthusiastic about the Italian army going to Greece and their yearning to commence was such that the Italian authorities had a difficult task of keeping them calm. (60) Actually their morale and spirit was torn to pieces once the fighting commenced, since they were fighting in awful weather conditions, ill-supplied and badly trained, disheartened due to their constant retreat before an enemy of whom they had been told that he would not fight and that they would beat him easily. (61)

While this tremendous unpreparedness and Fascist propaganda went on, Ciano concerned himself only with the drafting of the ultimatum to Greece which according to him
left "no way out for Greece. Either she accepts occupation or she will be attacked." (62) But surely, as Christopher Buckley points out in his book *Greece and Crete 1941*, Mussolini hoped that the Greeks would put up some show of resistance at least, which was urgently needed to balance the Napoleonic victories of Germany. Anyway, the ultimatum was neither to be accepted nor rejected because in most cases the Italian troops had crossed the Greco-Albanian frontier at least half an hour before its expiry. (63)

Let us examine now what forces the Italians had mustered in Albania and the Italian plan for the invasion. We have already seen so far that the occupation of Albania was achieved with relatively few forces, namely three divisions and some light tanks. On the eve of the Italian attack on Greece, the Italians had in Albania one Supreme Italian Command under General Visconti Prasca divided into two Army Corps, the XXV Army Corps of Ciamuria under General Carlo Rossi and the XXVI Army Corps of Koritsa under General Gabriele Nasci. (64)

The XXV Army Corps of Ciamuria was directed towards Epirus and included the following divisions: 23rd Ferrara and 51st Siena Infantry Divisions, the 131st Centauro Armoured Division and the Cavalry Division, totalling approximately around 42,000 men. (65) The XXVI Army Corps was directed towards Western Macedonia and included the following divisions: 49th Parma, 29th Piemonte, 19th Venezia and the 53th Arezzo Infantry Divisions. It totalled 44,000 men approximately. Finally, in between these two Corps, the 3rd Julia Alpini Division with 10,800 men was directed towards the mountainous Pindus area. As reserves, the Italian High Command in Albania had three battalions of Customs Officers, 21 artillery batteries, the 26th Chemical Warfare Company plus units of Bersaglieri, Blackshirts and Albanian irregulars. (66)

The 131st Centauro Armoured Division consisted of a three-battalion regiment with light three-ton tanks armed with two
8mm. machine guns; a regiment of motorized Bersaglieri and a regiment of motorized artillery. But these sardine-tin tanks, as Mario Cervi describes them, were suitable only on the appropriate terrain and in the right season. In an area with very few roads, and even fewer asphalted ones, at the onset of winter, the tanks were quite useless. (67) Many times the men of the Centauro fought as infantry rather than as an armoured unit.

The Centauro Division had 163 tanks altogether, 90 in the area of the XXV Army Corps and the remainder in that of the XXVI as a reserve formation. In terms of air power, the Italians had the following forces: 13 fighter squadrons, 60 bomber squadrons and 6 reconnaissance squadrons, making a total of 463 aircraft in all. These squadrons were stationed in Albania, in South-Eastern Italy (4th Air Zone) and in the Aegean. Italy had in the theatre 179 fighters, 225 bombers and 59 reconnaissance planes. In addition to those forces we must include the 5th Air Zone, operating from Libya, ordered to monitor and harass the Allied (mainly British) support for Greece. (68)

The Italian war plan had as its aims, first the sudden occupation of Epirus with a simultaneous capture of Corfu and the rest of the Ionian islands; and second, the capture of Western Macedonia. Later on, a march on Salonika and Athens and through the rest of mainland and island Greece would complete the conquest of the country. The plan was drawn up by General Prasca and approved by the Duce. The Italian forces were to hold an active defence in Western Macedonia (Koritsa) sector, and make an attack in the direction Kalpaki-Janina-Preveza right along the Epirotic coastline; with a simultaneous cover and support of the above mentioned line by another attack towards the direction Leskovic-Samarina-Metsovon. (69)

Within a few days the operational plan envisaged the capture of the fortified crossroads at Kalpaki with a pincer movement of the Ferrara and Centauro Divisions assisted by
the Siena, which would move then towards Janina. To the left and right of that major assault, the Cavalry Division and the 3rd Julia Alpini Division would operate. The Cavalry Division would move along the Epirotic coast and to cover the southwest. The Julia Alpini, a "crack" Division, was allotted the most difficult task, to cross the Pindus mountainous region and cover the northern sector. Another objective of the Julia, was to reach Metsovon and thus interpose itself between the Greek forces in Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus. In this way the Greek forces in the three discrete theatres of war would not be able to coordinate their activities. The north of the whole attacking force in Epirus was to be adequately covered by the Italian forces in the Koritsa sector that were to play an active defence role and in this way tie down as many Greek forces as possible, preventing their moving to the Epirus sector.(70)

The success of the whole plan was based on the assumption of having the advantage of sudden and unexpected attack, on the mobility and speed of the Italian forces before the full mobilisation of the Greek army was completed, and on the Italian air force which, with its size and quality, would be able to destroy the Greek communication and transportation facilities and network by bombing and thus slow down and disrupt Greek mobilisation. It was anticipated that the Italian army would need one week to reach Janina, and 15-20 days to reach Preveza.(71) It was also expected that with two divisions Salonika could be captured, and with 5-6 more Athens, once the above strategic plan had been executed in full.(72)

Of the nine divisions in Albania, almost half had been allotted to defensive roles in North and Central Albania while only the remaining had been given operational roles. Two divisions were stationed in the Koritsa sector as active defence against the Greek forces there, another two were on the Albano-Yugoslav border as a covering force. Three divisions were ordered to make the major frontal attack
against Epirus while the remaining two were to act as a covering unit for the flanks of the previous three. So, though the war plan was in general sound in its goals and directions, the initial disposition and allocation of the Italian engaging forces were wrong. The three divisions which were allotted for the frontal attack were totally inadequate in strength. But the Italians made their most serious mistake in underestimating the adversary's morale and numerical superiority and in overestimating the effectiveness of their own tanks and air force. And their mistake was to be costly.

2d) The Greek Preparatory Period

Now let us examine the Greek counter-measures from the beginning of 1939. Greece as a nation had no offensive attitude against any country, Balkan or non-Balkan. Until the occupation of Albania by Italy in 1939, Greece did not have any war plan against Italy. For this reason there was not any significant fortification of the frontier with Albania nor any expansion of the transportation system in that region. Until 1939, Greece considered that the only possible enemies of Greece were Albania and Bulgaria, but Albania on its own was considered of very limited fighting capability. Therefore, Greece's military preparation was mainly directed against Bulgaria. Similarly the war planning of Greece covered the Bulgarian theatre of war only. The Greek General Staff assumed that any war would be Balkan based (local and static) in which the army would play the most important role and this was clearly shown by "the elaborate and costly fortifications on the Bulgarian border". (I will discuss about the Metaxas Line when I come to the German invasion of Greece). Yugoslavia, Turkey and Rumania were treated as friendly nations and not as enemies of Greece, due to the Balkan Pact of 1934 and the bilateral treaties that Greece
had with Turkey. All the military obligations of Greece, in case of a Balkan war, therefore derived from her alliances with the rest of the Balkan nations and against their common Balkan enemy. Since the whole of Greek war planning was directed against Bulgaria, the Greek General Staff had established before April 1939 two contingency war plans: the B3 (Bulgaria) of 28th October 1937 which dealt solely with Bulgaria; and the SM (Allied) plan of 18th April 1938 which was for operations against Bulgaria and Albania and/or Hungary, in case these two/three countries joined forces to attack Greece. (76)

Both plans were primarily defensive, leaving the initiative to the enemy until the full mobilisation of the Greek army had been completed, and offensive operations could be undertaken. As Koliopoulos writes about Papagos's critics, the offensive spirit was not particularly the meat of the Greek military academy of the inter-war era. (77) With the beginning of the occupation of Albania, the Greek High Command was alarmed, surprised, unprepared, but above all openly exposed to a danger which had never crossed its mind that it might have to face. The first direct measure of the Greek Army General Staff in response to the new threat was to order the Greek frontier units to be vigilant and wary of Italian moves but not to provoke or clash with the Italian forces. From 3rd April 1939, the Greek Army General Staff, had reinforced the II Army Corps in Larissa with an infantry battalion and also the VIII Infantry Division in Epirus with an infantry battalion as well. (78)

After the complete occupation of Albania, the Army General Staff ordered the VIII Division to prepare demolitions on the main roads that led to Albania, Western Macedonia and Epirus, and distributed a small number of anti-aircraft guns taken from the Metaxas Line, to the I, II, III and IV Army Corps and to the VIII and IX divisions in Epirus and Western Macedonia. Finally the class of '39 was called to arms.
On 4th May 1939 a new operational plan was created, which assumed as adversaries both Bulgaria and Italy and was named IB. It had the following characteristics. Like the previous two, it left the initiative at the outbreak of war to the enemy. Britain and France were considered as allies (due to the 1939 guarantees) but the extent, the timing and the nature of their military assistance was unknown. Turkey was considered as an ally, while Yugoslavia, though a member of the Balkan Pact, was assumed to either stay neutral or under the pressure of Italy and/or Bulgaria to allow transit of enemy troops through her territory. It was also assumed that the Allies had an undisputed control of the sea, which did not however, rule out all Italian naval action against Greece, for Italy then had the largest submarine fleet on earth (121 boats).(79)

The Italians had in Albania at least five fully equipped divisions and they were locally superior to the Greeks. The Italian air force had an undisputed command of the skies. The Italian attack, if it were to take place, would probably strike from Koritsa to Salonika and Thessaly. Meanwhile another enemy penetration was possible in Epirus, but of less importance due to the inaccessibility of the terrain and the lack of local infrastructure. Bulgaria, depending on the Turkish attitude, would either take actual part in the operations against Greece or just threaten invasion, thus tying down Greek forces.(80)

The IB plan was initially defensive in order to give time to Greece to mobilise fully, so that it could tackle both Bulgaria and Italy. The Greek army was to abandon part of Western Macedonia as far as Mount Vermion and Epirus as far as the River Arachthos. In this way the Greek army would have time to construct a naturally strong second line of defence in the area covered by Arachthos -Zigos Metsovon- River Aliakmon- Mount Vermion. In the eastern theatre of war towards Bulgaria, it was anticipated that the Metaxas Line, which was the pride of the General Staff, would delay the
enemy for some time until a withdrawal was made to the above mentioned natural defensive line. The whole of the Albanian-Bulgarian war front would thereby meet on the same defence line. (81) See Map 2

According to the IB plan the allocation of the Greek forces would be the following: towards Albania 8 infantry divisions and 2 infantry brigades; towards Bulgaria 6 infantry divisions and 1 infantry brigade. As general reserves, 1 infantry division, 1 cavalry division and 1 infantry brigade. It was assumed that the strong Italian air force, would attack transportation and communication centres, and that the mobilisation of the Greek army would thereby be delayed, if not seriously hampered. So that it would take 20 days to mobilise on the Albanian and 15 on the Bulgarian front. (82)

Lieutenant-General Demetrios Kathehotis in his official report on the Strategy and Conduct of Military Operations in the 1940-1941 War, believes that the IB plan was a panic-stricken and defeatist one since it abandoned (even initially and temporarily) 200 km of land to the enemy, almost the whole of Epirus and Western Macedonia. Instead of withdrawing, Kathehotis believes that the Greeks should have fought step by step. (83) According to Kathehotis, General Staff’s allocation of the Greek forces to the two fronts, was 7 infantry divisions and 2 infantry brigades on the Bulgarian front, 5 infantry divisions and 2 infantry brigades on the Albanian front and the Cavalry Division in the Axios valley. Kathehotis also believes that the sum of money spent on fortifications was 700 million drachmas for the Bulgarian front and very little for the Albanian. Based on the above information Kathehotis’ point is that the IB plan was made up in this way in order to tackle the new problem and the new enemy, Italy, which had suddenly come onto the scene. Yet both allocation of the forces to the fronts and the distribution of money for fortifications tend to indicate that the Greek General Staff was still giving more importance to
the danger from the east, namely Bulgaria and not Italy, though the IB plan was constructed to deal primarily with the western danger. (84) Katheniotis fails to see the extra reason that brought the General Staff to make a third plan (IB) in addition to the two already in existence (B3 and SM).

Koliopoulos also agrees with Katheniotis and mentions that when in August 1939 Greece was negotiating with Britain for the purchase of aircraft, the Greek Government instructed its Minister in London to inform the British Government that it needed the aircraft to cover the Italian front, when actually its first priority for the aircraft was to cover the Bulgarian front and the Italian front was only a second priority. (85) This is another proof that even by August 1939 when the Italian threat was more obvious and more imminent, the Greeks still felt more threatened by the Bulgarians. The Greek General Staff justified this over-excited fear of Bulgaria by stating that owing to the lack of any specific military alliance with Turkey (though political ones existed), they had to eliminate the danger from Bulgaria on their own. Greece could not count on any specific Turkish military assistance deriving from any Greco-Turkish political alliance, but could merely hope that Turkey might intervene on Greece's side. (86)

As the increase of the Italian forces took place in Albania, the Greek Army General Staff, afraid of a sudden Italian attack in Epirus and Western Macedonia, suggested to the Government the mobilisation of the VIII and IX Infantry Divisions. This took place on 23th August 1939. At the same time the garrison on Corfu, about whose early seizure by the Italians so many "rumours" circulated, the IV Infantry Brigade in Florina and some units of the Cavalry Division, were put on alert, plus some supporting forces of the II and III Army Corps. Finally the Western Macedonian Army was established, which included the II and III Army Corps. (87) Some defects and anomalies due to the lack of material became obvious during this partial mobilisation, but the
deficiencies were made up quickly. Fortunately they did not re-appear when the real large-scale mobilisation took place on 28th October 1940, and that was partially due to the semi-mobilisation of August 1939 which had acted as dress rehearsal.

On 1st September 1939, the General Staff created the first variant of the IB plan, the IBa. In this Yugoslavia was considered neutral and in the best case analysis as an ally, contrary to the IB original in which Yugoslavia was assumed to have given in to enemy demands for military cooperation. Also with the IBa no part of Epirus and of Western Macedonia was abandoned to the enemy, except a small frontier corridor of 20-25 km as far as the River Kalamas. Meanwhile the construction of fortifications in Epirus were ordered to commence. See Map 2

At the end of April 1940, a second variant was produced, the IBb. The reasons for this, were the reduction of the British naval units in the Eastern Mediterranean due to the heavy commitment of Britain in the Atlantic and later, with the collapse of France, the absence of French naval forces altogether. The IB plan had presupposed Allied naval supremacy in the Mediterranean which would have defended the Greek coastlines, islands or convoys from any Italian invasion and intervention by the Italian naval forces in Southern Italy and the Dodecanese. Now with the French collapse and the British pre-occupation in the Atlantic, the Greek Army and Navy Staff had to provide for adequate protection of Greek waters. That what the IBb did, entrusting the defence of the beaches of Attica, Peloponnese to the I Army Corps, those of Crete to the V Infantry Division and those of the Archipelago to the XVIII Division. Also the sea area of Salonika was to be overseen by the Cavalry Division.

According to Katheniotis both the IBa and the IBb plans were like the original IB, pessimistic and defensive since neither provided for a solid defence near the borders. He
goes on to say that IBa, based (in contrast to the IB) on the assumption that Yugoslavia would not permit any enemy transit through her territory, was not created by the General Staff because it was assured through diplomatic channels that Yugoslavia would stand firm, though the General Staff claimed that was the basic and only reason for its being drawn up. Rather, he claims, it was created because the General Staff had recognised its previous mistake of abandoning a large part of Greek land to the enemy (even temporarily) with the IB plan, and had hastened to create a new plan (IBa) which abandoned less territory to the enemy, so that it (the General Staff) would not be called defeatist and pessimistic. (91)

Katheniotis, however, is wrong in this assumption, because the Greek Government, and therefore the General Staff, was reassured by the Yugoslav Government that in case of an invasion by Italy and/or Bulgaria it would not assist either of those two nations at all, though Metaxas had doubts about that Yugoslav commitment. (92) According to Katheniotis, General Staff's later account of the dispositions on the two fronts was the following: 8 infantry divisions and 2 infantry brigades in the Albanian front and 7 infantry divisions and 2 infantry brigades in the Bulgarian, plus the Cavalry Division as reserve.

Concerning the above Greek dispositions, Katheniotis argues that while the Albanian front was at last strengthened with more forces than the Bulgarian, in contrast to the IB plan which allotted more forces to the Bulgarian, the allocation of forces was still inadequate. The General Staff in its attempt to follow the policy of "being strong on both fronts" had divided the forces almost equally, thus creating two equally weak fronts, forgetting that the Albanian needed a larger reinforcement than the Bulgarian. Worst of all, he argues, the variant provided only one reserve division, the Cavalry, for both fronts. What would have happened, if both fronts had needed reinforcements? To which of the two, would the
Cavalry Division have gone?. And if one or both of the fronts needed extra reinforcements where could they have been found, since all the forces would have been already committed?.(93)

Starting on 23rd August 1940, when the Italian threats and provocations increased considerably, the General Staff ordered the mobilisation of the Western Macedonia Army, the II Army Corps, the VIII and IX Divisions and the IV Brigade. At the same period, it ordered the partial mobilisation of the I Infantry Division and the V Infantry Brigade. The General Staff also proceeded to the creation of the Pindus Detachment, the despatch of the XIII Infantry Division to Alexandroupolis and the creation and despatch of a significant number of infantry and artillery units from the interior of the country to Epirus and Western Macedonia respectively.(94) See Map 2

Now it is time we viewed the final battle order of the Greek armed forces. In the Epirus region the VIII Infantry Division was reinforced by the III Infantry Brigade. One infantry regiment, the 39th of the III Infantry Division was on its way to Epirus. In the Western Macedonia sector, the Western Macedonian Army (W.M.A.) with the II Army Corps having the I and IX Infantry Divisions, the V Infantry Brigade and the frontier forces of sector IXa (in battalion strength). The IX Division and the IXa frontier forces had been fully mobilised while the I Division and the V Brigade had been partially mobilised. The W.M.A. also had the III Army Corps with the X and XI Infantry Divisions, the IV Infantry Brigade and the frontier forces of the IX, X and XI sectors (at battalion strength in each sector). The IV Brigade had been mobilised on 23rd August 1940 and reinforced with two regiments, the 28th and the 33rd with their 6 infantry battalions. Finally there was the Pindus Detachment in between the Epirus and the Western Macedonian theatres of war, placed on the right of the VIII Division and the left of the IX Division, consisting of an infantry regiment, the 51st
(minus a battalion), a troop of cavalry, a 75mm mountain artillery battery and a 65mm artillery section. (95)

The Greek forces consisted altogether of 39 infantry battalions and 40% batteries, approximately 35,000 men. The Italians had 59 infantry battalions, 135 batteries, 23 out of them heavy artillery, 163 tanks, 18 cavalry squadrons, 6 mortar battalions and 1 machine gun battalion. (96) The Greek air force had 3 Bomber Squadrons, the 31st, 32nd and the 33rd with 35 aeroplanes (Potez 63, Blenheim and Fairey Battle), 4 Fighter Squadrons, the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and the 24th with 36 P.Z.L Polish planes and 9 French Bloch. The Army Cooperation air force had 1 squadron of light bombing and reconnaissance machines (15 German Henschel) and 3 reconnaissance squadrons with 35 French Breguet 19s and Polish Potez 25As. Apart from that, the Army Cooperation air force was reinforced with 5 Junkers (Ju52/3) civil aircraft for the dropping of material and supplies to isolated units. Finally, there were the air forces of the Navy, or the Naval Cooperation as it was called by the Greeks, with 3 Squadrons the 11th, 12th and the 13th, equipped with 21 Avro Anson and Fairey IIIF planes and with 12 German Dornier 22 seaplanes. The latter were converted into military planes for the army but unfortunately they never managed to be ready, before Greece was occupied. Additionally in the second line, there were 2 Gloster Gladiators, 6 Hawker Horsley II torpedo planes, 6 Avia B534 biplane fighters and a number of trainers. (97)

In naval terms, the Greek fleet consisted of the old battleship Averof, which was out of commission, 10 destroyers, 12 torpedo-boats, 6 submarines, 4 combined minelayers and sweepers and a few number of secondary ships. (98) It should be noted that one of the Greek submarines was continuously out of service due to lack of spares. The Italian navy, on the contrary, by late 1939 had 6 battleships, 8 heavy cruisers, 26 light cruisers, 61 destroyers, 69 torpedo-boats and, as I have said before, the
largest submarine fleet in the world, 121 boats (others say 119). Out of this superior and by any standards impressive navy, the Italians had in the Dodecanese on 2nd October 1940, at least 1 cruiser, 6 destroyers, 1 minelayer, 2 mine-sweepers, 16 submarines and 51 torpedo boats. It is also known that in December 1940 the Italians had 4 destroyers in Albania. Even if we include the ships of the British Royal Navy in Alexandria, which according to Cunningham's own words was made up of four battleships, two aircraft carriers, four cruisers, and the usual destroyers (what Cunningham meant by saying "the usual destroyers", was probably 2 destroyer flotillas and 1 submarine flotilla), the reader can easily see that the Anglo-Greek fleets, even combined, were vastly inferior (numerically speaking if not qualitatively) to the Italian fleet. Of course the French battle fleet had not been operational on the Allied side, since the armistice.

The Greek war plan dated 16 September 1940 was based on the IB operational plan, which, Mario Cervi points out, shows how predictable were the Italian moves. In the first place, the plan advocated defence of national territory with existing forces in order to give time for the rest of the Greek army to arrive. In a second stage, after the mobilisation of the Greek army had been completed and depending on the situation, undertaking of attacks in order to push back the invading enemy. In Western Macedonia, the Greek forces were at first to make only local attacks in order to occupy the valley of the River Devoli, south of Lake Prespa but later on, go on the offensive with the objective of capturing the mountainous area of Morova and the communications centre of Koritsa. See Map 2

In the Epirus sector, the Greek units had to delay the adversary and his ultimate annihilation at all costs on the line of Elea-River Kalamas was imperative. In the Pindus sector, the Greek force was ordered to check the frontier line and adjust according to the situation in Epirus. After the
completion of Greek mobilisation, an attack was envisaged on the flanks of the advancing enemy and on his communication centres. We have to mention here that the maximum withdrawal of the Greek forces in Epirus was the line Amphilochia-River Arachthos-Zigos Metsovon. The battle orders of the Greek General Staff (Nos. 101428 and 101422/422) to the VIII Division, on 27th September and 5th October 1940 respectively, ordered the VIII to protect its line without wearing down its own forces as to imperil the division’s principal objectives. The loss of national territory would be of lesser importance than the destruction or the battle-weariness of the divisional forces resulting in their inability to protect their sector and to cover the left of Western Macedonia and the roads leading though Epirus to Aetolocarnania.

However, the Greek armed forces on the whole lacked experienced officers and non-commissioned officers. As Richard Clogg and Spiros Linardatos argue, an anti-government coup led mostly by republican officers in 1935 had led to widespread purges among civilian officials but to even deeper cuts in the armed forces. The coup failed and it was believed that Venizelos had encouraged it. Though Venizelos escaped to France many Venizelist officers had been thrown out of the armed forces and forced to retire. As soon as the Italian provocations became intense, the Greek General Staff began to consider the re-enlistment of those experienced men and they continued to do so during the Italo-Greek war. The scheme had the strong backing of Papagos.

However Metaxas was a staunch royalist and an anti-Venizelist who did not want to see the return of Venizelist officers to the army. Metaxas believed that the Venizelists would alienate the army from his regime, and influence the armed forces to organise a new coup and to bring about his downfall. Let us not forget that Metaxas’s regime was dictatorial, undemocratic and unpopular among civilians. In
case of a new coup, it was possible that army and civilians, united, could force Metaxas to declare free elections or could even threaten his life. Metaxas had the backing of the King on that issue. At the end, some republican officers were called as reservists, but Metaxas still resisted any large reinstatement of those men.  

Greece could not expect help from any Balkan country (except Turkey) if Italy attacked Greece on its own because the Balkan Pact of 1934 had no value. Turkey had the moral obligation to aid Greece derived from the 1933 and 1938 alliances with Greece as well as from the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Treaty of 19th October 1939 (Articles 2 and 3). But in the first case, Turkey pleaded that there was not any specific military agreement with Greece, only political; thus, Turkey was able to evade her obligation towards Greece, even though Greece invoked the provisions of the 1933 and the 1938 Greco-Turkish alliances for mutual cooperation in case of war and preservation of the status quo borders.

In the second case, Turkey had the obligation to help Greece under the Treaty of October 1939, since Britain and France which had given guarantees to Greece, had agreed with Turkey that in case of a war in which Greece was involved, Turkey would be bound to assist Greece. Turkey pleaded that she was not ready militarily to aid Greece in case of a war with Italy and that she lacked essential air force and anti-aircraft equipment. Turkey said that if the British wanted her to assist Greece, then they should provide her with considerable military aid, which Turkey knew very well that Britain could not deliver, due to her own military needs.

In the meantime, the British Ambassador in Ankara, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, suggested that Britain should not press the Turks to fulfil their obligation towards Greece, because there was the fear that with Turkey preoccupied elsewhere, the Russians might take the opportunity to demand involvement in the control of the Straits.
Chiefs of Staff in London listened to the advice of the British Ambassador and decided not to press Turkey. (112) Turkey informed the British that the best she could do should Italy attack Greece alone, was to hold back the Bulgarians in Thrace and thus enable the Greek army to shift forces to the Albanian front. (113) The only thing that Turkey promised to do was to make a strong public announcement that they would consider Greece as within Turkey's vital interests and thus deter Italy from attacking Greece. They did so, very late, on 1st November 1940, after the Italian attack had started and even that public declaration was vague and extremely weak in nature. (114)

Greece expected assistance only from Britain, since France had collapsed. That made it very difficult for Britain to assist Greece on its own, while being herself heavily involved in North Africa, where Italian forces had managed to push back British forces under the command of General Wavell into Egypt, not to mention the temporary problems in East Africa.

It should be noted that on the whole, Greek strategy was mistaken in its belief that any war in the Balkan peninsula, would include Balkan states only. It was naive for the Greek General Staff to expect an attack from Bulgaria and/or Albania without the strong backing of an non-Balkan nation. Bulgaria and/or Albania would never plan to attack Greece without any support from a major Power - Italy, Germany, France, Britain and Russia, - simply because such a step would have invoked the provisions of the Balkan Pact and/or the bilateral agreements between Turkey and Greece. Therefore the Greek General Staff should have expected that: Albania - which anyway on its own was of limited military significance - could not plan a war against Greece without the support of a major non-Balkan power or perhaps Bulgaria; Bulgaria was much stronger than Albania, but still was unable to execute an attack against Greece even if it was joined by Albania, without the backing of a non-Balkan nation.
Both the Balkan Pact and the bilateral Greco-Turkish agreements aimed at supporting Greece in case of an inter-Balkan war, which anyway was highly improbable. Hence it is evident that Greece should have considered that a Balkan attack on her could only materialise with the strong military support of a major Power. Military plans including the role of a major Power into a Balkan war must have been made in the Greek General Staff. It was not meant to be, and that superficial attitude dealing with the defence of Greece was to be very costly.

2e) The Fortifications

From the summer of 1939 onwards, there had been some activity in the construction of obstacles and fortresses that could stop or delay the enemy, but due to the lack of financial resources the establishment of the defence works on the Albanian front was limited to 50 machine gun posts in Western Macedonia which could stand up to 220mm shells. Anti-tank obstacles, barbed wire and trenches completed the picture of the defence. In Epirus specifically there had been an attempt to fortify the Elea-Kalamos line which was the key place and protected the whole of Epirus from the north. A significant number of defence works were built together with supply dumps and shelters, while roads were widened and demolition works were prepared. To the west, in Kalpaki, the fortification was not followed up to the same level as in other areas.

Lieutenant-General Charalambos Katsimetros, divisional commander of the VIII Division, says that the division had been given the sum of 1,800,000 drachmas to be spent for defence works in the region. The money was not used in full because the war started. However 110 bunkers were created, able to withstand powerful artillery and air barrage, 20 machine-gun posts were placed in the rocks so as to be invisible to air and ground reconnaissance and very shell
proof. 16 artillery observation posts and 10 infantry observation posts were also constructed. Also anti-tank ditches were dug, obstacles of 4,500 metres in aggregate length were put up, minefields were laid and demolition works placed on bridges and roads. (116)

Thus according to Katsimetros, the division was protected by a series of defence obstacles which made the Elea-Kalamas position quite strong to resist the eight-day attack of the Ferrara Division and the 131st Centauro Armoured Division. (117)

2f) The Morphology of the Terrain, the Transportation Network and the Economics of Mobilisation

The whole of the Greco-Albanian frontier has a length of 240 km. approximately, of which 80 are in a very mountainous area. The terrain close to the border is very rough, on both sides, and especially inside Greece. The road network of the Albanian theatre of war was extremely poor. Only four large roads existed. One along the coast, leading from Valona-Konispol to Philiates. Two inland ones, the Argyrokastron-Cacavia (Kalpaki) and the Premeti-Merdjan-Elea road, which join into one road that leads to Janina. The fourth road leads from Koritsa to Kapetista and from there to Vatohori-Florina or to Kastoria, and to the east of Thessaly and Metsovон. Between Western Macedonia and Epirus there is no road network due to the presence of Mount Grammos. Only the lengthy (450 km.) road from Florina through Kozani and Larissa to Janina, allowed some degree of communication between these two theatres of war. (118)

The railway network was also relatively undeveloped since it had only two stations in the north, Florina and Amynteion, and two further south, one at Larissa, where there was only a narrow gauge railway line, and one at Kalabaka. The whole theatre of operations created many and important difficulties not only for the strategic concentration of forces but also in
the conduct of the military operations and the re-supply of the army. (119)

Katsimetros hoped to be able to stop the advance of the Italians in his sector, knowing that the full mobilisation of the Greek army would take 20 days, even if not delayed by the enemy air force. Metaxas himself had declared that if the Greeks could hold the Italians for a fortnight, then they would win. (120) The fact that the Greek army was not alerted earlier was due to the insistence of the Greek Government not to provoke the Italians and precipitate their attack. Apart from that there was another reason of an economic nature. The full mobilisation of the Greek army would cost the nation at least 2 billion drachmas per month. (121)

It was 1,100 million drachmas per month for the mobilisation of the army only, plus 479 million drachmas for its concentration, and the rest would be spent for the mobilisation of the navy and the air force. Greece, which did not wish to provoke the Italians, would not have been able to maintain the bulk of the forces under arms indefinitely, since it was not known when, or if the Italian attack would take place. If we take into consideration that Greece did not expect any economic help, then it is understandable that Greece could not expect to have its army fully mobilised and equipped for a long time since such an action would have drained to the utmost the already exhausted economic means of the country.

At the same time the morale and the spirit of the Greek army would have been ruined completely by any prolonged mobilisation without any real action. Ultimately, the effect of it on the economy and civilian life would have been disastrous. (122) Finally a lengthy mobilisation apart from being economically unrealistic, would have upset the morale of the citizens of Greece since they would have been forced to live with the fear of a sudden and unknown Italian attack. If we consider that the Italians landed in Albania in April
1939 and the actual invasion of Greece took place in October 1940, that means that for a year and six months the military, civilian and economic aspect of Greece would have suffered tremendously and irretrievably from a specific but still unshaped anxiety over the Italian possible aim and actions. (123) With all this in mind, the Greek Government preferred the partial and secret mobilisation of certain age groups each time, which was a lot cheaper and caused less alarm among the people.

On 27th October 1940, Lieutenant-General Charalambos Katsimetros, divisional commander of the VIII Infantry Division, on the Epirus front, and therefore in the first line of defence, went to bed "extremely tired due to the physical and spiritual fatigue of the day, having the phone by his bed, with his conscience calm, his mind at rest, and his soul unshaken." (124)

2g) The Unbelievable Miracle
2g1) The Italian "Stroll" to Athens 28th October-14th November 1940

Epirus Sector

The Italian advance in Epirus on the morning of 28th October 1940, all along the west coast, was quite fast since by noon of the next day they had reached Philiates. The VIII Division withdrew rapidly from its border outposts and the Italians pushed on. On 30th October the Italian thrust was identified as being made by the 51st Italian Infantry Division. The Italians were quickly checked by the Greeks and failed to cross the River Kalamas with a battalion and some mountain artillery. (125) See Map 3

On 5th November, the Italian army managed to cross the Kalamas and to create a small bridgehead south of the river. (126) The next day the bridgehead was enlarged and 3 Greek battalions and artillery were forced to withdraw to occupy the line Mount Souli-River Aheron on 7th November.
without being further followed by the Italians. During the same period Italian tanks and infantry began to launch spearhead attacks on the Elea defence line supported by artillery and aircraft. Their attempts, until 8th November, failed completely. The VIII Greek Division, in order to save its own forces, withdrew on the night of 3rd-4th November south of Elea and moved undisturbed towards the Kalamas. (127)

Pindus Sector

In Pindus, the Italians advanced and created a pocket towards Metsovo, pushing back the Greek forces behind the frontier. The Italian 3rd Julia Alpini Division moved between Mount Grammos and Mount Gamela, driving back the few Greek troops (the Pindus Detachment). The Greek High Command, seeing the danger of the Italians establishing a strong foothold within Greek territory decided to reinforce the two sides of the pocket with fresh Greek troops, so as to block a further widening of the pocket which would have put the flanks of the Greek forces in Epirus and Western Macedonia in a perilous situation. (128) See Map 3

In supporting the Pindus Detachment, units of the I Division, the V Brigade with cavalry units moved, into the area to take command of the sector. The movement took place mainly on foot, since the existing roads could not cope with any mobile transport. On 1st November, the retreating Greek forces and those coming to their aid were established on the line Mount Grammos–Mount Vouzion–River Aoos–Gamela. Between Mount Vouzion and the River Aoos, there was a significant gap, which the Italians aimed to reach before the Greek forces could arrive and close it. Due to the numerical superiority of the Italians over the Pindus Detachment and the appalling weather conditions (snow and rain intermittently), the retreating Greek forces were disorganised and in a state of confusion which was made worse by the lack of ammunition, guns and food, and by the
physical tiredness of the fighting men. (129) To these one should add the lack of command and the temporary sharp decline of Greek morale.

On 1st November the Italians repulsed the Greek troops stationed on Mount Vouzion and the next day the Italians occupied the village of Samarina. Then they proceeded towards Distraton and occupied the village of Vovoussa on 3rd November. This was the furthest point of the Italian advance in Pindus. (130) On 1st November, the Greek forces counter-attacked in Pindus with the aim of hitting at the left of the Italian troops in Samarina. The V Brigade was among the attacking forces, aided by the I Cavalry Division which entered this theatre of operations on 3rd November. On 4th November Vovoussa was retaken. The Greek local counter-attack went on from 5th November until the 7th. The 3rd Julia Division, and its two regiments, the 8th and the 9th, in Distraton and in the south-west at the foot of Mount Smolikas, gave up any further offensive attempt to reach Metsovon and started to retreat, abandoning all its advanced posts. (131)

As the British War Office files indicate:

"By that time the 8th regiment [of Julia Division] was in full retreat towards the frontier, abandoning all its equipment but pursued slowly by the Greeks owing to their logistical difficulties and to the bad weather. An Albanian infantry company was reported to have surrendered as a complete unit." (132)

The Greeks continued their pursuit of the 3rd Julia Division, and on 13th November they re-took the Mounts Smolikas and Grammos. The Pindus passes had been secured and the danger of the Greek forces in Epirus and Western Macedonia being split in two was avoided. The 3rd Julia Alpini was almost encircled and annihilated. By 13th November, the majority of the Pindus area was back in Greek hands. The Italians brought up urgent reinforcements in
order to assist the Julia to escape from the ring closing around it. Thus the 47th Bari Infantry Division which hastily arrived in Albania, was thrown into the battle, but failed to aid the Julia. The Bari had been assigned the task of landing at Corfu but, owing to the hazardous situation into which the Julia had fallen, had been shifted to Albania.(133) The 8th Regiment of the “crack” Alpini division, cracked.

Western Macedonia Sector

In this theatre of war, the Italians kept a low profile and refrained from a full attack. They restricted themselves to driving back the Greek border troops. Some artillery shells were fired into Greek positions casually. The Greek General Staff decided to take the initiative and start a local attack in an attempt to create a diversion and thus relieve the pressure on the Greek units in Epirus and Pindus.(134) The IX Infantry Division and the IV Brigade moved forward on 1st November with the goal of capturing the foothills of Pontchara, Tresteni, Krenta, Talik, Vernik, Golina and Lokvat. The Italians reacted in the IX Greek Division’s area with intense air bombardment without any significant result. In front of the IV Brigade, the Italians put up increasing resistance and their expulsion from Greek soil required the use of bayonet charges. The Italian air force bombed and machine-gunned the Greek positions and the Greek supply columns.(135) Two more Italian infantry divisions, the 48th Parma and the 29th Piemonte were operating in the area. Later, the 19th Venezia Infantry Division was also engaged to secure and stabilise the front. Visconti Prasca, replying to a letter from Marshal Badoglio, wrote that he was hopeful that the situation would improve and that the initial difficulties were due to the awful weather and the lack of transport. He explicitly said that the Venezia and Piemonte Divisions had to march for two and three weeks respectively before they could reach their final destination, through extremely rough country.(136)
But the situation had worsened for the Italians. With the retreat of the Italians west of the River Devoli in Western Macedonia, the Greek IX Division and the IV Brigade (expanded and renamed XV Infantry Division from 4th November onwards) were ordered to stop their pursuit of the Italians and prepare for the forthcoming attack on the mountainous Morova complex.

**Epirus Sector**

After the initial success of the 51st Siena Infantry Division reinforced with a Grenadier regiment, a cavalry regiment and heavy artillery units, in crossing the River Kalamas and occupying Igoumenitsa, the Greek VIII Division short of reserves for a delaying action, withdrew to a new position blocking the passes to Preveza and Janina. The 39th Evzones Regiment of the III Greek Infantry Division reinforced the new defence line. The Italian troops did not pursue the Greeks but restricted themselves only to a cavalry operation to occupy the village of Margariti. It is assumed that the Italians had been so reluctant and hesitant to proceed further because they feared loss of contact with their supply bases while marching towards Thessaly, where the Elea position had not yet been breached. (137) See Map3

Gradually from 8th November 1940, Italian offensive spirit started to diminish, but they did not give up quickly. The beginning of their decline in morale was partly due to the change of command. Visconti Prasca had been replaced as Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces in Albania by General Ubaldo Soddu. It was also partly due to the new order from Rome to assume a defensive position. (138) While the majority of the Italian formations were slowly starting to regroup and retreat, suddenly, on the morning of 4th November, they made a combined local attack in the Elea area with 50-60 tanks and 80 motor-cycles supported by the Italian air force. However their attempt was quickly checked by the anti-tank barrage of the Greek artillery. The majority
of the tanks and the motor-cycles were completely destroyed and the Italian infantry heavily shelled. (139)

However, the Italian attempts to break through the Elea-Kalamas position did not stop. On 5th November, after the usual artillery and air force preparation barrage, the Italian infantry marched into the attack once more. But in this case too, the Italian attack was repulsed and the Italian men and tanks were decimated by the accurate fire of the Greek artillery. Most of the tanks were blown up while the remainder fell into the Kalamas swamps.

For the next two days the Italians continued to press in a vain attempt to capture the Elea position. Some crack Italian units managed on the night of 7th November to storm Mount Psychorache, south of Grambala, but faced a direct Greek charge and after intense hand to hand fighting, the Italians were thrown back and forced to withdraw. That was the Italian’s last chance to occupy the position of Elea. Grambala, the key route to Janina, was safely guarded by the VIII Division. (140)

At the end of the 15 days fighting most of the Greek territory in Epirus and in Pindus was back in Greek hands, while on the Western Macedonia front the Greek forces had occupied parts of Albania. The Italian assault was not reinforced adequately and after its local and initial success, was checked and finally stopped. There are some basic reasons why the Italian attack crumbled. As the British War Office files indicate:

The Greek success was due to both military and morale superiority. The Italians had reached the Greek defensive positions without penetrating them and the Greeks had shown far greater power of manoeuvre than their adversaries, adopting a method of warfare which suited their needs, and keeping to the heights commanding the roads. This rendered the Italian equipment and command of the roads valueless and the fact that the Greeks had mounted their counter-attack without waiting for full mobilisation to
be complete threw the Italian calculations out and helped in achieving the superiority in morale which was such an asset to the Greeks”. (141)

Visconti Prasca, in a discussion he had with a Greek military adviser in Italy in February 1946, said that one of the reasons for the Italian failure was the lack of reinforcements when he urgently needed them. He had requested nine divisions, out of which he received only four regiments of Bersaglieri and those were without transport. (142) Mario Cervi also comments on that, saying that there was chaos in the organisation of reinforcements and that the troops were thrown into the battle frantically ill-armed and ill-equipped. (143)

Another reason for the Italian failure was the thorough training in mountain warfare of the Greek forces and the “Greek morale which was magnificent from the very first. It was based on high patriotism and the conviction that the Italians never had been and never would become serious soldiers.” (144) On the other hand, intense propaganda had let the Italians think that the Greeks would not fight and when they discovered the contrary they immediately despaired. (145)

Another significant factor was the Italian decision to postpone the invasion of Corfu. Visconti Prasca believed that the capture of Corfu would assist in the assault of the Italian troops in Epirus because he thought of having Corfu as a basis for concentrating supplies even after the capture of Preveza. But the Bari Division was sent to Albania to assist the ground forces while the Italian navy was afraid of the British navy intercepting the invading Italian forces. (146)

The mechanised and armoured forces, which the Greek army encountered for the first time and managed to destroy, were used by the Italians either in support of the infantry when counter-attacking, or to attack the flank of a Greek advance in order to annihilate it. The leading tanks were
always destroyed by artillery fire or by falling into anti-tank obstacles, and the remainder were forced to retire. Moreover there was the impossibility of using tanks effectively on the very few roads that existed. Finally, that wireless was used in only some Italian tanks brought tremendous confusion to the Italians. (147)

Visconti Prasca complained about the lack of adequate mountain formations and the inferior quality of the Italian infantry divisions compared to the Greeks who were raised in the mountains. Also, he complained about the inability of the Italian air force, though superior in numbers and in quality, to obstruct the Greek communications and transportation, thus allowing the Greek mobilisation to proceed smoothly. On the contrary, the Italian air force took the initiative to bomb mostly the big cities and towns and not the concentrations of the Greek army, nor its supply columns and its infrastructure. (148)

The Italian air force did not attempt to bomb the Greek advancing forces very often and when it did so, it was from an extremely high altitude (for fear of the Greek air force and anti-aircraft guns) and thus quite ineffective and insufficient. Italian aircraft were used piecemeal many times, and the Albanian airfields congested with planes quite often became targets of the Greek and — from 3rd November — of the British air force. (149) Last but not least, the Italian air force did not support and cooperate on a tactical level with the Italian infantry which was advancing without air cover and became easy prey of the enemy. The atrocious weather conditions frequently grounded both the Italian and the Greek air force.

Visconti Prasca went on to say that he was ordered to assume the defence too soon and if he had been allowed to continue his pressure, he would have managed to push back the Greeks. Here the Greek military adviser commented that probably this was not the case, since the Italian formations were disorganised anyway and they were moving slowly and
often far away from their supply bases, thus lengthening their lines for reinforcements and convoy equipment. (150)

A very important reason that added to the Italian failure, was the Italians’ “great carelessness in the use of enclair wireless. Repeatedly messages have been intercepted by the Greeks, giving tactical information of the highest importance. The Greek Staff said that the habit was particularly prevalent during periods of movement.” (151) The Greek VIII Division had numerous times intercepted open signals and were able to use the information for its own benefit to adapt its defence accordingly. (152)

Also, the Italian artillery was not well deployed and not of a high standard of accuracy. The Italian medium artillery was often placed in forward positions and in the open resulting in its loss either to capture by enemy infantry advance or to shellfire. There was no coordination between infantry, artillery and tanks. Often the men moved unsupported by tanks or air power and were thus cut to pieces. There was also a shortage of mules, horses, lorries and ammunition. (153) The tanks, too, moved without any artillery support that would have excluded or minimized enemy shelling of the advancing tanks. In many cases tanks were destroyed because of bad deployment without the necessary reconnaissance of the terrain, falling into anti-tank obstacles, minefields, anti-tank ditches, swamps etc. (154)

Finally Italian misfortunes were increased by their tendency to surrender very quickly or to run away without even attempting an orderly withdrawal, abandoning their equipment. The appalling weather was also a disadvantage. (155) The weather conditions of snow, hail, rain, wind and the very low temperatures were an indirect assistance to the Greeks since most air and ground movement was severely hampered. The Italian tanks and mechanised forces were bogged down in the mud and unable to exploit their advantage of surprise and mobility before the Greek mobilisation was completed. (156)
The Italians' lack of attention to the weather pattern had caused them not to bring enough engineers and bridging equipment. Moreover, as van Creveld points out, the Italians were racing into Epirus, a valueless and mountainous region, instead of setting as their primary goal Salonika which was a key city.(157)

2g2) Naval Operations Up to December 1940

On the other hand, the Greek mobilisation went as scheduled, assisted tremendously by the Greek navy, which by 16th November had safely carried 41,578 men and 18,057 pack animals without a single loss. Up to December 1940, the Greek navy had safely transported 77,621 men and 28,431 animals, again without a single loss.(158) The Greek fleet had managed to operate in enemy waters and on 31st October 1940 two destroyers, Psara and Hydra, had achieved the naval bombardment of Sagiades and Konispol near the borders in support of the Greek's army defence. The bombardment was successful. Fires were seen from the Italian positions and that assisted in the delay of the Italian advance and the stiffening of the morale of the Greek border troops under Italian pressure.(159) The Greek navy undertook three naval sorties (14/11, 14/12/40 and 4-5/1/41) in the Straits of Otranto, all of them with destroyers only, but were unsuccessful in discovering enemy convoys. The third, in January 1941, achieved the bombardment of Valona with unspecified results.(160)

All of these raids were undertaken against the advice of both the Chief of the Naval Staff Rear-Admiral Alexander Sakellariou and the Commander of the Fleet Rear-Admiral Epaminondas Kavvadias. The missions were carried out under strong pressure from the government and primarily the Premier, who wanted to demonstrate to the public that the navy, too, was contributing to the war. A secondary reason was to attempt to reduce the Italian convoys to and from
Albania and thus curtail the level of supplies, troops and reinforcements reaching Albania. (161) Sakellariou believed that the Greek destroyers could have been faced with overwhelming Italian naval units and that if it had not been for the Italians' bad intelligence system and insufficient coordination with their air force, they might have gained an easy victory at a time when it would have badly shaken the confidence of the Greeks. (162) The Greek submarine fleet achieved an even more notable victory by having its submarines patrolling in the Straits of Otranto and sinking 4 ships of approximately 15,983 tons up the end of December with a loss of a single submarine, Proteus, which was sunk on 29th December 1940. (163)

The almost complete absence of the Italian navy from operations against the Greeks, was based mainly on the presence of the British navy in the Eastern Mediterranean and especially in Crete, which in this way isolated the Italian naval base in the Dodecanese. The Italian submarines attempted to attack Greek convoys, but without success because the Italian skippers used to fire their torpedoes from a great distance. That was the result of a design fault which forced the Italian submarines to fire while semi-submerged. (164)

Also, the extremely bad weather, the presence in Greece of the British air force which bombed the harbours of Valona and Brindisi congested with ships (165) the minefields, and enemy (mainly Greek) submarine activity, forced the Italian navy to restrict itself to a defensive role. (166) As Marc Antonio Bragadin suggests, the Italian navy had been constantly preoccupied first with the shipping to Libya, which had priority over anything else, and then with the convoys to Albania. (516,440 men, 510,668 tons of material, 87,092 pack animals, 15,951 tons of general purpose and combat vehicles, 1,070 escort missions by Italian warships, until April 1941). (167)
Thus, the Italian navy was forced to use most of its surface and sub-surface units for the protection of sea routes to these two places. When the Italian navy had some available ships, these were used again as escorts to the Dodecanese which were blockaded by the British. Finally only at the end of November 1940 did the Italian navy, at the request of the army, start to bombard Greek and Albanian coastal positions and take action against Greek shipping and shore batteries in the Aegean. The Italian naval forces in the Dodecanese participated in such operations.

2g3) Air Operations Up to December 1940 and Appraisal of Greek Strategy

The small but not unimportant Greek air force cooperated with the two other services in the first 15 days of fighting and assisted the general effort to halt the Italian invasion. The Greek air force was inferior to the Italians in numbers, and the quality of the aeroplanes was questionable due to their obsolescence. The lack of training of the pilots, their inexperience in war and their bad living conditions added to the difficulties of the Greek air force.

The Bomber Squadrons (31st, 32nd, 33rd) undertook low altitude bombing missions against enemy airfields, supply centres and enemy concentrations. Owing to lack of planes, they did not operate over mainland Italy but only over Albania and especially in the zone of the military operations and over large towns such as Valona, Tirana, Durazzo, etc. By December 1940, the three squadrons had between them accomplished 119 missions, including the bombing of harbours, airfields and other military installations in Koritsa, Argyrokastron, Valona, Elbasan and Berat. The bomber squadrons also intervened over the battlefields, strafing the enemy during the capture of Koritsa, and carried out strategic reconnaissance and photographic missions on behalf of the army.
The Greek Fighter Command with four Squadrons (21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th) had many difficulties since their planes were underequipped in terms of both armament and payload and obsolete. The planes of the 24th which were French Blochs were almost completely grounded throughout the war by defective engines whose operational endurance was limited by rapid overheating. The Fighter Command was responsible for covering vulnerable areas, escorting convoys and bombers, strafing enemy troops and most of all dog fighting. By the beginning of December 1940, the Fighter Command had carried out 340 missions.

The Army Cooperation air force lacked speed, manoeuvrability and armament in comparison with the enemy. Unfortunately, the distance of their bases from the front and the lack of adequate airfields near the front meant that most of the Army Cooperation planes were not fully operational. However, up to the end of the war they logged 252 hours of operational flying. It was thanks to them that the 3rd Julia Division was first sighted in Pindus and by low level bombing and strafing was temporary held up in the Vovousa area, until Greek forces came up to finish it off. Both the Greek fighter and bomber squadrons, sustained heavy losses due to the superiority of the enemy airforce both in numbers and quality and due to the weather conditions.

Finally, the Naval Cooperation air forces with 12 Avro Anson, 12 Dornier 22s and 10 Fairey, undertook missions from coastal airfields over the Aegean and the Ionian Sea, such as escorting convoys and anti-submarine and coastal patrols.

In criticizing the Greek response to the Italian invasion, we must note what Koliopoulos writes in his book *Greece and the British Connection 1935-1941* that the "Greek General Staff was very little prepared for anything but static warfare on a fixed line of defence." Clearly the Greeks were deeply influenced by the World War I French ideas about long-
lasting trench warfare. That is why they built the Metaxas Line. But Greece was not France, and neither this war was a repetition of the First World War. The Greeks were extremely pessimistic about their ability to repulse an Italian attack. The Greeks had obviously overestimated the Italian ability to pursue their assault over inhospitable terrain and in appalling weather conditions, and underestimated their own chances of mounting a successful counter-attack when opportunity arose.(178)

Lieutenant-General Athanasios Geramanis claims that the destruction of the Italian forces in Epirus was not due to a "trick" which the Prime Minister had thought up, as was publicly claimed later on. According to the article in the newspaper Acropolis (16/7/59), it was claimed that the Prime Minister had omitted to order the mobilisation of more forces in Epirus and in Pindus not because he did not want to precipitate the Italian attack on Greece, but because he wanted to deceive the Italian High Command and make them believe that Epirus and Pindus were defenceless and thus lead them into a trap when they invaded Greece in these "defenceless" regions.(179)

Geramanis believes that though the Greek war plan of the High Command for the annihilation of the Italians in the Epirus sector was sound, the General Staff had left this area thinly covered and totally unprotected. Geramanis thinks that the line Elea-Kalamas should instead have been reinforced immediately the Italians invaded Greece, in order to counteract the massive numerical and qualitative superiority of the Italians, of which the Greek General Staff was amply informed. The reason the Italians failed to pierce the Elea-Kalamas position was that Italian efforts were ineffectual and that the VIII Division fought with determination.(180)

The pessimistic mood of the Greek General Staff can be traced back to the time IB contingency plan was drafted in 1939, under which the VIII Division was ordered just to delay the enemy, (and to give ground rather than fight a
battle, in case it wore down its own forces, something which would have endangered the whole Elea-Kalamas sector. (181) To that Alexander Papagos would argue that time was urgently needed to complete the mobilisation and deployment, and that the temporary loss of territory would not matter so much, since it would be retaken, as it was, after Greek mobilisation was complete. Thus, delay of the enemy, even at the cost of ground, was the only sound solution until more Greek forces were transported to the front. (182)

However this argument is not entirely supported by the order given to the VIII Division on 22nd August 1940, which explained to the division that no victories were expected of it in view of enemy superiority, only that it save the honour of Greek arms. A similar order was given to the VIII Division on 30th October, the third day of the Italian attack. The VIII Division had to cover Thessaly and Western Macedonia, and block the roads leading from Janina to Zigos Metsovon, and from Epirus to Aetolocarnania. The division was ordered not to wear down its forces which could endanger the fulfilment of the above tasks, even at the cost of giving ground. (183)

However it seems that at some point even Katsimetros thought of giving ground. As the battle in Epirus continued, the VIII Division taking into account the unfavourable condition in Pindus, and the possibility of the Italians outflanking the division decided to withdraw. However the General Staff ordered the division to stand and fight informing it that the condition in Epirus was not so tragic as it seemed, and that reinforcements were sent there. Finally, it reminded to Katsimetros that the General Staff would decide whether the situation in Epirus imperiled the position of the VIII Division and not the division itself. On 7th November, the VIII Division reiterated to the same point again, and expressed doubts about its ability to hold the Elea-Kalamas position. The General Staff informed again the division that new reinforcements were on their way to the
division and to the whole of the Epirus front, and issued
orders for the solid safeguarding of the Elea-Kalamas
position. (184)

Another important indication of the lack of unanimity of
support within the Greek governmental administration for
Metaxas in his determination to resist any Italian attack, is
the attitude of Papagos and Under-Secretary for Foreign
Affairs Nicholas Mavroudis (among others), who were
prepared, if necessary, to surrender Epirus to the Italians.
Metaxas has two entries into his diary on 12th and 13th
August, 1940 respectively:  “My decision to resist to the end.
Hesitants about that some Ministers and Papagos.” “Everyone
is afraid. I am the only one who acts.” (185) Mavroudis was
considered by Metaxas as a traitor for being increasingly
pro-German. On 24th October, Mavroudis had stated to the
German Minister in Athens that, Greece might possibly give
sympathetic consideration to a (Italian) demand for bases,
but any Italian attack on Greece would be resisted. (186)

Geramanis points out that from the moment the Julia
Division was almost encircled in Pindus, the General Staff
should immediately have moved sufficient forces to complete
its encirclement and block its retreat. However, the General
Staff delayed doing so, and when it did, the Greek forces
were so weak, tired and isolated that the enemy found the
opportunity to escape towards the west. The destruction of
the pocket, in which the Italians were almost trapped, was
not achieved because Greek troops arrived gradually and
without coordination in mountainous terrain under constant
rain and snow. They were too slow and provided the Julia
with just enough time to slip out of the closing pocket and
save its neck. (187) As a result of that mistake of the General
Staff, the Julia, though almost annihilated, escaped to
regroup and rest, and so it continued to be active in Albania
up to the end of the hostilities, when such a “crack” unit
could have been destroyed and the Greeks could have saved
themselves from future problems that arose when they encountered it again, in Albania.

2g4) The Greek Offensive 14th November-31st December 1940

After the stabilisation of the front on 13th November 1940, the Greek General Staff decided that the time was ripe, not just for a local attack as before, but for a major offensive all along the front with the aim of throwing the Italians back to Albania and possibly driving them out of the country altogether before they could solidify their positions and reinforce themselves. The aim was the occupation of Morova and Ivan with the III Army Corps in Western Macedonia. In that way the communication centre of Koritsa would be isolated.(188) However, there was a disagreement between the III Army Corps and the W.M.A. to which the Corps belonged. The W.M.A. believed that, though the II Army Corps was able to move from Grammos to Smolika, it was not ready to muster a large offensive, and that the same was the case with the III Army Corps. The III Army Corps believed that it could start an attack, even though not in perfect order. For this reason, the W.M.A. did not think it wise to undertake a major offensive in Western Macedonia before these two corps were fully prepared and supplied.(189)

The General Staff was in a hurry because it believed, very correctly, that the Italians should not be allowed any time to regroup and reorganise their forces. They should not be left any respite to fortify the Morova-Ivan position which would have made a later Greek assault later very dangerous. Most of all, the General Staff did not want to lose the morale of the Greek troops by waiting even a little longer and it did not want to allow a further worsening of the weather to postpone or delay a Greek advance.(190) For these reasons it ordered a major offensive to start on 14th November.
According to the General Staff, the strategic aim of the W.M.A. was, after the capture of Mount Morova and if the conditions permitted it, a further deep move to cut the roads leading to the plain of Koritsa from north, west and south. In the south, the W.M.A. should try to reach the road to Erseka or at least to bring it under fire. Even further south, the W.M.A. should have as its objective to capture Leskovic and thus join forces with the right of the I Army Corps. The I Army Corps was ordered to move on the Janina-Tepelene axis, to cover the area of Merdjan. If that proved beyond it, the I Army Corps should limit itself to the occupation of the Hani-Burazani-Koritsa motor road. See Map 4

As a general aim, the Greek General Staff ordered that both the W.M.A. and the I Army Corps should try to secure at best the Merdjan-Erseka-Koritsa road and, at worst, to deny its use to the enemy. The General Staff decided to act in this direction in order to allow the Greek troops to be adequately supplied along the Janina-Merdjan-Erseka-Koritsa road. With this road the General Staff estimated that it could easily transport troops from the one front (Western Macedonia) to the other (Epirus). Until the Janina-Koritsa road fell into Greek hands, the Greek fighting men would use the Elea-Janina-Mourgani-Grevena-Kastoria-Koritsa road.

The Greek army in Albania had under its command 11 infantry divisions (including 7 new ones) 2 infantry brigades, 1 cavalry brigade and 1 cavalry division. These were allotted as follows. The W.M.A. comprised the III and II Army Corps. The III Army Corps with the IX, X and XV Divisions and the XI Division concentrating in Argos. The II Army Corps in Pindus with the I Division and the V Brigade and the Cavalry Brigade which had been mobilised, comprising at the beginning one light cavalry squadron and a Skoda artillery battery. In Epirus there was one corps, the I, with the VIII, II and the Cavalry Division. In reserve were the IV, XVII, III and V Divisions and the XVI Brigade. This makes a total of approximately 232,000 men, 556 guns and 100,000
animals. Additionally, the XIII Infantry Division was later added to the III Army Corps. On 11th November, the X and XI Divisions were placed under one unified command called Divisional Group K.(193)

The Italian army had thrown into Albania eight new divisions, some cavalry formations, Bersaglieri and Blackshirts, and by now had sixteen divisions.(194)

**Western Macedonia Sector**

The attack in this sector started on 14th November with three infantry divisions of the III Army Corps, the X, IX, and the XV to the north and south of the Ivan position, while in the centre it was planned only to make contact with the enemy. The whole attack shifted more to the left where the terrain was better than in the north. The Greek High Command decided not to assault the Tsagori position directly since it lacked tanks and adequate anti-tank weapons.(195)

The Italians were pushed back and on 16th November the Greek forces occupied positions south and north of Darza; on the 17th and 18th, the Greeks enlarged those positions. On the 19th they occupied Darza itself and on the 22nd the large town of Koritsa fell into Greek hands.(196) It was then realised that the Greek forces committed to the battle had been facing five Italian divisions; they had not anticipated the presence of the 53rd Arezzo Infantry and the 2nd Tridentina Alpini divisions. This victory over the Italians after an eight day struggle inspired the Greek troops who fought against all odds. The Italians were superior in numbers and quality of equipment and the Italian air force was in control of the skies. More than that the Italians had been mobilised and prepared for the campaign for a long time whereas the Greeks were hastily supplied. Finally the Italians had had ample time to fortify their positions.(197)

See Map 4
Epirus Sector

Here the Greeks though less reinforced, attacked from Kalpaki, hoping to persuade the Italians that the Greeks were able to advance all along the line. The gamble came off. The initial stage of the offensive was carried out by the VIII Division and the III Brigade, while on 17th November the II Division came into the fight. By 22nd November, the Italians had been driven out of Greek territory and the Greeks stabilised the front west of the River Aoos. On 22nd November the Greeks were in the area of Kastanies. (196)

In the Thesprotias region the Greek forces began their advance on 12th November and by the 20th had reached the River Kalamas throwing the Italians back. On the 22nd, they crossed the river and captured Philiates. At the same time, in Pindus, the right of the I Army Corps consisting of the Cavalry Division and the I Infantry Division, plus the V Brigade from the II Army Corps, moved towards Konitsa, which they occupied on the 16th after a series of hard fights. On 21st November, the Greek forces crossed Mount Grammos and the River Aoos and occupied Leskovic and the Leskovic-Karit road. (199)

So far, the Greek offensive had been an unqualified success and now the problem of a deeper advance into Albania was to be discussed and solved by the General Staff. A continuation of the offensive by the Greeks was possible and attainable, if weather permitted, and had every prospect of success. But now the Greek High Command was faced with a dilemma. Two major options were examined for continuation of the campaign: the Florina-Koritsa-Elbasan axis and the Janina-Valona axis. The first line of advance was supported by only one road, which could easily be blocked and fortified by the enemy. Also the succession of high mountains were difficult to cross, and that did not assist military operations during winter.

The southern Janina-Valona direction had a more extensive road network, the climate was milder and its successful
occupation would secure the Corfu Straits as a Greek submarine base and the harbour of Santi Quaranta as a supply base for a further advance towards Valona. The capture of Valona would facilitate the replenishing of the Greek army, and would decrease the Italian unloading capacities to Durazzo, since the harbour of San Giovanni di Medova, further north was of very limited capacity. Another was the lack of transport to maintain supplies and reinforcements.(200)

Greek transport consisted, to a large extent, of requisitioned vehicles, which were consequently of different types, very old and much used. Moreover they were just enough to serve the army at the beginning of the campaign, but with the continuation of the fighting, most of them became unserviceable through continuous operation, yet, as the winter came, the Greek army needed transport even more urgently in order to march forward. As a result of that serious handicap, the Greek High Command decided to move along the Janina-Valona axis because the successful capture of the harbour of Santi Quaranta and the road from Elea to Santi Quaranta would shorten the route for supplies and reinforcements to the front and would simultaneously save vehicles for military operations in the Tepelene-Klisura area.(201)

The task of occupying Santi Quaranta, securing the roads from Leskovic to Koritsa and from Cacavia to Santi Quaranta; and advancing towards Valona was allotted to the I Army Corps with the II, III and IV Divisions (the latter came as a replacement to the III) and the greater part of the VIII Division, while the III Infantry Brigade withdrew to regroup. The II Army Corps was to extensively secure the Leskovic-Koritsa road and the plateau of Koritsa. After these objectives had been attained the II Army Corps was to advance towards Klisura and Tepelene and open up the Siousista river valley. The III Army Corps and Divisional Group K were to pin down as many enemy forces as possible
in the north and west of Koritsa, so as to allow the other two corps to attain their objectives. See Maps 4, 5, 7

The II Army Corps comprised the I Infantry Division and the Cavalry Division with the V Brigade withdrawing to regroup. The II Army Corps was ordered to control the Leskovic-Koritsa road and the plateau of Koritsa, while advancing to cover the communication centre of Klisura and Tepelene in order to secure the Siousista river valley. The III Army Corps had the IX, X, XI, XV Infantry Divisions in line and the XIII in tactical reserve, plus the XVII which came later on as a replacement to the XIII. Finally in general reserve were the V Division and and XVI Brigade. (202)

Koritza Sector

The Greeks pressed on with the XIII and the IX Divisions towards Pogradec after gaining the heights of Morova-Ivan. The X Division moved towards Moschopolis, Lake Malik and the mountain passes to the west of the Koritsa plateau were quickly taken and the only serious resistance met was in the Pogradec area where the enemy brought up mechanised forces to stop the Greeks. A new Italian infantry division was identified, the 48th Taro. The lack of tanks and adequate anti-tank guns forced the Greeks to outflank the Italians from the west through mountainous and almost inaccessible terrain. On 30th November, the Greek forces occupied Pogradec and thus secured the whole area around Koritsa plateau. A deeper advance, though attainable, was regarded as too costly, so the Greeks stopped here. See Maps 4, 5, 7

In Moschopolis, the enemy resistance was weak but the ground was rough and the weather atrocious. By 8th December, the X Division had advanced 25 km and occupied the Devoli river valley. In the south between the River Aoos and Ostravitse, the Greek I Infantry Division, the Cavalry Division and the V Infantry Brigade managed on 5th December to capture Premeti, though the Italians had brought up tanks and new divisions such as the 5th Pusteria
AIlpini Division, the 37th Modena Infantry Division plus Blackshirts and Bersaglieri.

Epirus Sector

The Italians moved up new forces in order to check the advance of the VIII Division, such as one regiment of the 37th Modena Division, one regiment of the 5th Pusteria, one cavalry regiment and Blackshirts. The ground was rough and favoured the Italians who were on the defensive. At the end of November, the III Greek Division entered the battle and overran Cacavia, while the II Greek Division destroyed the Italian forces on the River Suha and moved towards Argyrokastron which it took on 8th December. However its movement was stalled by bad weather, the Italian air force and tanks, and its own lack of tanks and anti-tank weapons forced it to move into the mountains which, though inaccessible to Italian mechanised forces, made its march slower and longer.(203)

On the left of the Epirus sector, after the capture of Philiates, the Greek troops of the Thesprotias Battle Group moved north. To create a diversion, a Greek infantry company from Corfu landed in the area of Stilos. The trick was successful in convincing the Italians that there was a danger of a massive landing in the area. Though the Greek company was completely wiped out when it clashed with superior forces, it managed to make the enemy withdraw to the north. Thus on 6th December the Greek units without resistance occupied Santi Quaranta (re-named by the Italians Porto Edda after Mussolini's daughter) and on the 8th they secured the line Santi Quaranta-Cacavia covering the height of Argyrokastron. In this way the strategic objective of securing the Koritsa plateau, the road Leskovic-Koritsa and the road Elea-Santi Quaranta was fully achieved.(204)
Koritza Sector

After the successful capture of Pogradec the II Army Corps managed by the 24th to occupy the line Trembel-Gouri Prer clearing the whole eastern side of Mount Tomor and to improve its position. The General Staff did not allow any further movement of the II Army Corps in the Tomoritsa valley because it needed rest and regrouping. For that reason it was necessary for the Greek troops to descend from the mountains where it was extremely cold and remain closer to the Gouri Prer pass where their supply would take place along the Devoli valley road. See Maps 4,5,7

The XV infantry Division, part of the II Army Corps, improved its positions too on the mountain line Sevrani-Garonin on 20th December, while it attempted to reconstruct for its own use the Merdjan-Klisura road which had been destroyed by the Italians and by the flooding of the River Aoos.(205)

Epirus Sector

The military operations proceeded undisturbed by enemy action, but the appalling weather conditions of snow and storm, from 15th December altogether had halted any Greek advance. In the west, where the weather situation was better than in the east, some local attacks took place up to the 28th with the aim of capturing the line Khimara-Vranista-Boliena. During that period, the Italians had deployed for battle the 4th Cuneense Alpini Division, the 33rd Acqui Infantry Division and the 11th Brennero Infantry Division.(206)

During the period from 14th November to 31st December 1940, the Greek forces employed in Albania consisted of 11 infantry divisions, 2 infantry brigades and 1 cavalry division against 15 Italian infantry divisions and 1 armoured division.

All the Greek objectives at this stage had been accomplished but the Greek troops had not been able to exploit in depth their offensive successes. The reasons are
simple: the Greek troops lacked armour and anti-tank guns in order to tackle the enemy armour. Therefore the Greeks were obliged to follow mostly mountain routes where enemy armour was not easily employed; but that exhausted Greek forces and delayed significantly their advance. Also, the Greek army was desperately short of the transport which would have speeded up its attacks and increased its impetus. These difficulties, together with the serious shortage of artillery shells, prevented the Greek units from operating in open plains and forced them to carry out warfare mostly in mountains where rapid deployment and movement were restricted. The Italians, who were in possession of both transport and armour, even in a terrain that did not favour large mechanised action, were able to evacuate and re-deploy their forces quite fast. For example eight new Italian divisions were transported to the front very fast while the Greek ones had to march very long distances and arrived exhausted.

The mobility of the Greeks was also reduced because the mountain routes which they were forced to take, as mentioned above, also slowed down their reinforcement and supply columns. Last but not least, the Greeks were moving slowly but steadily deep into Albania and away from their communications and supply centres, thus increasing the time needed for the convoys to reach the front, while the Italians by withdrawing were closing the distance from their bases for replenishing and supplies, thus minimizing the time needed for their troops to be re-equipped. Often Greek units had to march for days under appalling conditions until they reached the front, while the Italians could transport, supply, regroup or withdraw their forces faster and with less fatigue for the men, since they could use their motor transport.

The Italian air force also played a role in slowing down the Greek advance by bombing the roads, bridges, railways and harbours and thus checking the Greek thrust somewhat, though not very significantly. Finally, the appalling weather
conditions of snow, sleet, rain, wind, and freezing temperatures and the effect of that bad weather (mud, floodings etc) on the almost non-existent road and rail system caused the Greek army to move slower and to be supplied and re-equipped slower and provided a constant need for frequent shelter and rest. (207) Surely the weather and the lack of transportation network must have affected Italian mobility as well, but to the Greeks it was much more detrimental, since they were on the offensive and away from their replenishing bases. It should be noted that the Greek army entered the war with around 640 automobiles of all types, when it needed at least 7,000 for executing defensive operations only. It is understandable that offensive operations required an even larger number of automobiles. The different types of automobiles increased the difficulties of maintaining and servicing them due to the different types of spares needed.

At the end of December 1940, the Greek High Command decided to postpone temporarily any major offensive. The General Staff would wait until the communications system had been completely restored, the living conditions of the troops made more tolerable, the units' losses in men, equipment and animals replaced and weather conditions become more favourable.

The General Staff ordered the units to take defensive positions and secure the ground already won. Only local attacks were allowed, to improve the positions of the troops and to maintain the offensive spirit among the men. The II Army Corps was ordered to attack the mountainous Sevranin-Garonin region in order to accomplish the occupation of Klisura. In the west, the I Army Corps should assist with its right in the occupation of Klisura by clearing the area south of the River Aoos in the valley of the River Zagoria. These military operations were considered essential for the preparation of a major attack later on, when the conditions
permitted it, and for the better replenishing and provisioning of the II Army Corps. (208)

During the offensive the Greek navy transported safely 18,172 men and 3,373 pack animals and sank 4 enemy ships by submarine action. (209) The Greek air force undertook 17 bomber missions, with 133 hours of flying, 54 fighter missions with 174 hours of flying, and 13.95 hours of flying for the Army Cooperation air force. (210)

Now let us make an appraisal of the Greek strategy so far: Lieutenant-General Geramanis believes that though the aim of occupying Morova with the III Army Corps was sound, the left of the corps had not been reinforced adequately. The result was that after the initial attack made by the X and IX Divisions on the line Goubel-Mali Kouk-Lises, the forces of both divisions were extremely weak because each one had attacked on a 10-12 km. front, thus making, instead of a strong and vigorous thrust, just a light contact. Both should have attacked on a more restricted front. (211)

Later on, the W.M.A. decided that the results of the first days' fighting had been relatively insignificant and ordered successive thrusts on a short front. The III Army Corps ordered a vigorous offensive with the aim of achieving more positive results. It seems that the Greek General Staff decided in Western Macedonia to stop for a while after the capture of Morova, until they decided in what direction they should develop their future strategy. The delay gave the enemy the opportunity to withdraw and construct a more convenient line, from Pogradec east of the River Devoli to Mount Karora, which would make his displacement by Greek forces extremely difficult. This Italian line was naturally strong, and they had ample time to fortify it as well. The Greek Staff should have listened to the proposal of the III Army Corps and should have pressed with utmost speed against the Italians without leaving them time to regroup and fortify. (212)
At the same time, the repercussions of the Italian military fiasco in Albania were obvious in Rome. The Commander-in-Chief of the Italians in Albania, Visconti Prasca, had been replaced by General Ubaldo Soddu on 8th November. On 29th December it was his turn to be replaced by General Ugo Cavallero. Marshal Badoglio, Chief of Staff of the Italian Armed Forces had resigned on 26th November; de Vecchi, Governor of the Dodecanese, and stubborn and fervent supporter of the invasion of Greece, had resigned on 5th December; and Admiral Domenico Cavagnari, Chief of the Naval Staff had been replaced by Admiral Arturo Riccardi on 12th December 1940.

Mussolini had been frantically raging, cursing, appealing, praising, promoting and sacking in order to save the situation. He had personally instructed Soddu, while in command of the Italians in Albania, that “whatever may happen to you I command you to defend to the last on the line Pogradec-Tepelene-Klisura, even if you are completely encircled by tomorrow morning”. That order came to Soddu after the fall of Khimara to the Greeks on 22nd December, but the situation was already irrecoverable for the Italians. Ciano, wrote on 28th November in his diary, that the “Greek pressure continues, but above all our resistance is growing weak. If the Greeks had strength enough to penetrate our lines we might yet have a great deal of trouble” and again on 29th November “our soldiers have fought but little, and badly”.

The Italian army in Albania was in a state of chaos and despair. The Italian retreat after the fall of Koritsa, though orderly enough, had cost the Italians a great deal of material which had to be left behind. The troops received supplies irregularly and their equipment was worn out. The Albanian battalions had disintegrated completely. The morale of the Italians was very low, even lower than at the beginning of the campaign and resistance crumbled everywhere. The Italians were demoralised and surrendered in masses.
As Cervi writes:

"The 8th Alpini Regiment of the Julia Division had lost 80 per cent of its effectives, the Bari Division had been almost wiped out and one of its infantry regiments, the 139th, had to withdraw because it had no more ammunition, the stores had run out of hand grenades and the luckier units were reduced to one day's supply of other ammunition." (219)

General Scuero, responsible for supply services, reported to Cavallero that:

"Reserve rations, nil. Equipment, minimal. Woollen clothing, zero. Infantry ammunition, none. Artillery ammunition, insignificant. Arms and Artillery, all supplies exhausted. Engineering equipment, practically nil. Medical equipment, inadequate." And Cervi comments that "the only notable thing about the document is the variety of ways in which it says the same thing i.e. that in Albania there was practically nothing at all." (220)

On 19th December 1940, the Siena Division was cut to pieces, while in retreat in Albania. Frostbite was a common thing. The "legendary" might of Italy had disappeared instantly. (221) The Germans were upset about the humiliation of the Italian army which brought the Axis into ridicule and gave Britain the opportunity to re-establish herself on the continent. On 14th November, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the German Staff, and Marshal Badoglio had a meeting in Innsbruck. Keitel told Badoglio that Germany was extremely annoyed that Italy had taken the initiative in Greece without asking Hitler, when Hitler wished the Balkans to remain tranquil. Now it would become necessary for Germany to annihilate Greece before it became an important base for the Allies. (222)

On 18th November, Ciano met Hitler and Ribbentrop in Salzburg. "The Germans are gloomy, and it is not difficult to understand why. There was a heavy atmosphere. Hitler is
pessimistic and considers the situation much compromised by what has happened in the Balkans. (223) Hitler wrote a letter to Mussolini dated 20th November stating that his aim of coming to Florence had been to persuade Mussolini to postpone the invasion of Greece until after the occupation of Crete by Italo-German airborne forces was accomplished. (224)

To that letter Mussolini replied on 22nd November, stating his view on the Italian failure, which he attributed to a) to rain which did not allow the movement of mechanised forces- Mussolini wrote that the whole of the 131 Centauro Armoured Division was immobilised by mud; b) the desertion of all the Albanian forces- an Italian division had had to disarm 6,000 Albanians; and c) the Bulgarian attitude which allowed the Greeks to shift 8 divisions to the Albanian front. Mussolini assured Hitler that Italy had 30 divisions in Albania with which she would be able to eliminate Greece. (225) Mussolini said nothing at all of the defective organisation of the Italian forces. (226)

On 4th December, Soddu telephoned Mussolini and informed him that "any military action has become impossible and the situation must be settled through political intervention." Ciano remarked that "this is grotesque and absurd, but it is a fact. We have to ask for a truce through Hitler. The Greeks will, as a first condition, ask for the Fuhrer's personal guarantee that nothing will ever be done against them again. I would rather put a bullet through my head than to telephone Ribbentrop". (227) This was the state the Italian politicians and military men had fallen into.

To return to the appraisal of the Greek strategy, according to Cervi, Papagos was an officer of the old school and he liked advancing with his flanks covered and well-protected. Greek intelligence was not able to calculate precisely the ability of the Italians to persist in their attack in Albania or their (in)efficiency in reinforcing and supplying themselves.
Papagos seemed to over-estimate the Italian army altogether. (228)

Geramanis believes that the Italian tanks could not have become an obstacle to the advance of the Greeks west of Koritza because three Greek divisions, the XV, X and the XI, were directed towards areas inaccessible to armour and had the ability to cut the Italians’ road of retreat. The Greek General Staff should have seen beyond any doubt that the Italians were not able to hold the ground west of Morova and would have to withdraw as soon as possible because they faced the danger of being totally cut off and surrounded. (229)

Therefore, the Greek High Command should have ordered the immediate pursuit of the retreating Italians instead of halting the advance of the Greek forces on the Ivan-Morova line until conditions were more favourable. The General Staff had available four infantry divisions the XV, XIII, X and XI. But the Greek General Staff, afraid of Italian superiority, did not exploit the chances it had for the total destruction of the retreating Italians and the accomplishment of another victorious result for Greece. (230)
Chapter 3
Milestones

3a) Operation Alpenveilchen (Cyclamen)

The situation in Albania was indeed very hard for the Italians who, by the end of December were in continuous retreat, as the Greeks pressed onwards. On 4th December 1940, Ciano called to his office the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Dino Alfieri, who was recovering from an illness in Rome and urged him to return to Berlin, explain to the Germans the terrible situation of the Italian army in Albania and plead for military assistance. (1) The Italians were being pushed back and were faced with the horrible prospect of being expelled from Albania altogether. Ciano said explicitly to Alfieri "any assistance, so long as it's prompt. The situation is such that the despatch of a few aeroplanes, a few guns, a few battalions may make all the difference. It's a question of gaining time - a few days, perhaps even a few hours." (2)

On 19th December, Colonel von Rintelen cabled a message from Rome to Berlin stating that the situation in Albania was so critical that a heavy military defeat was possible. (3) The Duce wrote to Hitler on the 28th asking him for a direct intervention against Greece into Thrace through Bulgaria, though the letter was not sent immediately. That was, partly, because of Duce's appreciation that German military help in Albania would be useless, since the Germans could not arrive in Thrace for a month, and because their assistance was not welcomed, as we will see below. On the other hand, in Libya, German formations were more than welcomed. (4) When the Italian Military Attaché General Efisio Luigi Marras, returned to Berlin at the end of December, he told Keitel that the despatch of some German battalions into Albania would stabilise the front quickly.
On 7th December, Alfieri saw Ribbentrop, who after being critical of the Italian move against Greece, asked the Italian Ambassador what kind of help Italy was requesting from Germany. But Alfieri was not in position to answer because he was not informed from Italy; neither was Marras. On Alfieri’s initiative, the Italians asked for transport planes (since the transportation of Italians by ship to Albania was in danger from the British and Greek fleets) and Ribbentrop suggested light artillery batteries. On 9th December, Hitler had a conference with his aides and Chiefs of Staff to discuss the situation in Libya and in the Balkans. The Germans decided that the Italian line in Albania must be held and that the Greeks must not be allowed to march any further into Albania. It was decided therefore that military assistance of two and a half divisions including one mountain division and parts of a panzer and of a motorised division would have to be sent to Albania to consolidate the front. However, the transportation and the unloading difficulties were great and would have to be reviewed closely before German troops were sent to Albania.

The conference ended with Directive No.22 for German support in the Mediterranean. Accordingly, one German corps consisting of the 1st Mountain Division and the armoured forces was to be sent immediately the Italians gave their assent. The aim was to reinforce the Italian line in Albania in any future crisis and to assist the Italians to go on to the offensive while at the same time breaking through Greek defences to open up the passes west of Salonika and thus support a frontal attack of the German army from Bulgaria. Thus, Operation Alpenweilchen was not simply a defensive operation; it envisaged the acceleration of the occupation of Greece by the coordination of efforts between the Germans in Albania and an attempt by the German army to break through the Greek lines on the Bulgarian border. In this way, Plan Cyclamen foreshadowed the future German attack on Greece, rather than being merely support for the
Italians in Albania. Perhaps it was also a chance for the Germans to step into Albania and direct German-Italian operations against Greece, since the Italians had been so incapable and ineffective in doing it alone.\(^{(8)}\)

When Alfieri saw Hitler on 8th December to plea for military assistance, Hitler offered Ju-52 transport planes to assist the Italians in Albania, by transporting troops and supplies from Foggia. But the Italian High Command never gave the green light for the German participation in Albania. Ciano informed Alfieri on the 9th, that Italy had asked "for nothing, absolutely nothing at all, simply because the military situation had improved in Albania."\(^{(9)}\) Actually the situation was even worse than before, because three days later, the Italians lost Klisura. But what happened? Why did Ciano lie to Alfieri about the Italian situation in Albania? Why did the Italians suddenly reject the German military aid they had asked for and which they so desperately needed?

Simply because the German participation of units in Albania was considered by the Italians as an indirect German approach to interfere with the Italo-Greek war and run it according to their own needs and desires. The Italians realised quickly that Hitler, with the Italian plea for military assistance, had grasped the opportunity to interfere with their affairs in the Mediterranean and thus turn the Greek war to his own benefit, taking into account the certainty that the Greeks could not possibly withstand even a limited German blow from Albania.\(^{(10)}\)

According to van Creveld, Germany was laying the groundwork to obtain a foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean and turn Greece and the South-East Europe into their own sphere of influence. Possibly Germany wanted to link the Greek operation with the forthcoming German reinforcement of North Africa because British military assistance in Greece (we will review that assistance later on) was rapidly growing. The Germans might have wanted to block any further British military presence in Greece, before
it could turn threatening to their Balkan allies and their future attack on Russia. As van Creveld says, Italy interpreted the German "offer" of military assistance as a pretext for a "foul Teutonic attempt to penetrate into Italy's living space."(11)

Cervi says, that if the Italians had let the Germans interfere in Albania directly with their own troops, they would have taken the initiative, and they would have commanded the war as they wanted. Surely they would have defeated the exhausted Greeks, but most of all they would have secured all the territorial gains and the prestige of German victory. For the Italians it was much better to have their own little war in Albania, regardless of the defeats and humiliations, than to be reduced to German puppets as they were to be in North Africa with the appearance of Erwin Rommel in February 1941.(12)

Van Creveld argues that for this reason only, the Italians put up a show, exaggerating how poor the port facilities were in Albania and claiming the unloading facilities were inadequate to cope with German supplies as well as their own. However, by February 1941 the Italians were maintaining in Albania more than 27 divisions, while claiming to the Germans that they had only one port, Durazzo, which could not accommodate more than three ships at a time and had a maximum supply and disembarkation capacity up to 20 divisions only. However the Italians left a possibility open. If the Germans allowed Italian troops to participate in the attack on Greece from Bulgaria along with the Germans, then they might "try harder" to accommodate German units in Albania.(13)

Van Creveld goes on to claim that Hitler was not willing to include any Italian units in his masterplan for the attack on Greece. Anyway Rintelen had assured Hitler that the situation in Albania had improved somewhat, with the stabilisation of the Italian line and the gradual decline of the Greek offensive, so the possibility of a complete Italian
expulsion from Albania had, for the time being at least, receded. Moreover the German formations in Albania could not start operations before the middle of April, due to logistical problems. That meant that after the Twelfth Army launched its attack from Bulgaria at the beginning of April, Operation Apenveilchen would seem needless. Hitler therefore, forgot all about military assistance to Italy and instead concentrated on planning Germany's attack on Greece. (14) Owing to the "insuperable" Italian transportation problems at their only operational port Durazzo (Valona was considered as "totally insecure") German assistance to the Italians in Albania was limited to 53 Ju-52s which, from December 1940 up to the end of February 1941, had ferried to Albania approximately 39,816 men and 4,700 tons of supplies in 1,665 troop-carrying missions and 2,363 supply sorties, from Foggia in Italy. (15)

3b) German Strategy - Operation Marita

Germany as shown above, did not want to involve the Balkans in the war a) because she did not want to disperse her forces into many war theatres simultaneously; b) because the area remained a basic source of important raw materials which Germany needed to import if she were to continue the war; and c) because Germany did not want to draw Italy into the Balkans militarily in case Russia clashed with her for the domination of the area. (16) Additionally, from early December 1940, German planning for the invasion of Russia took precedence over all other operations and thus the Balkans were given less attention and importance. Cruickshank writes that equally important, Germany did not want to see the Balkans transformed into an Anglo-French base that would become a threat to Germany's right flank and would interrupt the flow of supplies, particularly of oil, from Rumania to Germany. Germany feared a strong British
presence in the Balkans which could result in the forming of a Balkan bloc against the Axis. (17)

That is why Germany wanted to secure the Balkans through diplomacy and not war, if possible. Their cooperation was estimated as valuable if the war were to expand to the east. But Italy had stirred up the Balkans. Not only Italy had entered into a war with Greece which the German General Staff did not like at all (18) but she had been unable to end it quickly and successfully. Thus it had created a significant diversion of forces and material to a military deadlock. Italy had made the mistake of invading Greece and thus providing the Allies with the best possible pretext to install themselves there and bomb the Ploesti oil-fields. (19) In addition, Italy’s unfortunate campaign in North Africa since December 1940 was also bound to have a negative effect on Italy’s domestic politics, on the personal prestige of the Duce and on Italy’s military prestige altogether.

The repercussions of that Italian action, apart from giving the British the opportunity to intervene in Greece militarily, were also political. As Walter Warlimont says, Spain had refused to agree to the attack on Gibraltar, among other reasons, because of the Italian blunder in Greece. (20) Turkey had been under “extreme” pressure from the Allies to fulfil her military obligations to Greece and the Germans feared that she might crack under that pressure thus creating a Greco-Turkish front supported by the British against the Axis. (21) At the same time Hitler was afraid of the possibility of an Allied lodgement in Salonika, like that of 1915, which could develop ultimately into a strategic thrust into Thrace threatening the south-eastern flank of the German army in Russia. Also by late 1940, Hitler assumed that the liquidation of such a potential danger was imperative before he commenced his drive eastwards. (22)

But a very important reason as well was the German peripheral strategy. As early as September 1940, Jodl and Grand Admiral Raeder had informed Hitler that the
possibility of a landing in Britain was an illusion because the risks were great due to the strong presence of the Home Fleet and the inability of the Luftwaffe to destroy the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.). (23) Jodi and Raeder proposed the peripheral strategy with which Britain could be brought to her knees by the loss of her strategic posts in the Mediterranean such as Gibraltar, Malta and the Suez Canal. (24) Hitler turned to the Mediterranean also because of the Italian defeats in North Africa and their near collapse.

According to Cruickshank, Raeder's support for an operation to dominate the Mediterranean was partly due to leading part the navy would have in it, though one should think that Raeder's plan must have been wishful thinking due to the strong pressure of the British Mediterranean fleet. He proposed such an operation to Hitler. The aim would be to occupy in addition to the above mentioned targets, the Canary islands and, later on, Palestine and Syria up to the borders of Turkey. (25)

Basil Liddell Hart believes that Hermann Goering and Raeder were fervent supporters of such an operation because they initially, wanted to avoid a German drive eastwards, which they knew would be more difficult than the capture of British key places in the Mediterranean. Raeder, most of all, was against any venture in the east which would open a second front before the British were defeated; hence his peripheral strategy aimed at defeating Britain by the strategy of indirect approach. Jodi, too, backed the peripheral strategy, because he could clearly see the benefits of such an operation but he also sympathised with Hitler's fears of a Russian expansion in Europe at the expense of Germany, justifying Operation Barbarossa. (26)

Thus the German reaction to the Balkans was more for offensive purposes - against Britain - than defensive - to save the Italians from disaster. In other words the German intervention in the Balkans was, as perceived by them, a defensive operation conducted offensively. Their attack on
Greece, had more to do with a pre-emptive action against Britain in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans (and the support of Operation Barbarossa), than with the support of the deteriorating Italian position in Albania. (27) As General Warlimont says, the German attack on Greece was completely overshadowed by Barbarossa and it turned out to be defensive. British intelligence on the basis, Hinsley suggests, of speculation and not evidence, thought that Hitler's aim in occupying Greece was defensive, to stop Greece becoming an English air base from which the Rumanian oilfields could be attacked. (28) This theory is supported by the fact that Hitler had despatched a great number of anti-aircraft guns to Ploesti, as part of the general military aid which he had ordered for Rumania, under the pretext of merely reorganizing and training the Rumanian army. Taken together with the decision to despatch the X Air Corps to Sicily in December 1940 to support the Italians in Cyrenaica and the despatch of German troops to Libya under Erwin Rommel in February 1941, this had the aim of creating conditions which could change the whole course of war in favour of Germany. (29)

Thus, as early as 4th November, Hitler was considering proceeding an attack on Greece through Rumania and Bulgaria in the direction of Salonika and Larissa, with or without the consent of Bulgaria. It was estimated that at least four weeks would be necessary to prepare such a coalition. It was believed that Russia would stand idle while Bulgaria was reinforced militarily, in order to dissuade the Turks from attempting to assist Greece. (30)

On 12th November, Hitler issued Directive No. 18 which cleared the attack on Greece based on the use of one army corps of approximately ten divisions. It would be necessary to occupy part of Greek mainland, north of the Aegean and thus establish bases from which mainly British targets in the Eastern Mediterranean, could be hit. The Yugoslav railway system was not sufficient to undertake the transportation of
all German units, so the German military mission in Rumania was reinforced and equipped to sustain such a task.(31)

Two days later, the Naval Staff submitted another memorandum to Hitler stating that the Italian blunder of attacking Greece was a great one and had strengthened Britain's position in the Mediterranean by leading to her occupation of the islands of Lemnos and Crete and the establishment of air and naval bases. The Italians had not only lost the momentum, but they had no leadership and military efficiency, to quickly and decisively end their operations against the Greeks and the British in the Mediterranean. Thus Italian prestige had suffered considerably while Greece was gaining by damaging Italian endurance. The Naval Staff proposed that the entire Greek peninsula should be occupied and not only the north of Greece. The aim, now, was conquest down to the tip of the Peloponnese so as to reduce the value of Crete in British hands.(32)

Finally on 13th December 1940, Hitler issued the final Directive No. 20 called "Marita" dealing exclusively with Greece. Due to the uncertainty in Albania, it was important for Germany to frustrate all British attempts to establish a Balkan front which could threaten Italy and the Ploesti oil-fields with air strikes. The target was to occupy the north coast of the Aegean and if necessary the whole of mainland Greece. The first objective was the occupation of the Aegean coast and of the Salonika basin. A second objective, if necessary, was the conquest of the Corinth Canal via Larissa. The role of the air force would be to support army operations, to eliminate the enemy air force and to destroy or capture its bases with the use of airborne troops, if need be (foreshadowing Operation Merkur). Finally all the forces committed to Marita were to be withdrawn fast for a new deployment elsewhere (clearly meaning Barbarossa).(33)

The army earmarked for Marita was the 12th Army commanded by Field Marshal Wilhelm von List which
incorporated, among other units, the Kleist Panzer Group. The army was to assemble in Rumania, cross the Danube into Bulgaria when the weather allowed and then attack the Metaxas Line advancing with its right wing on Salonika and with its left to Alexandroupolis. The operations were to commence at the beginning of March 1941 with a possible duration of four weeks but, due to unfavourable weather conditions which did not permit the bridging of Danube to Bulgaria, and grounded all air operations, and to the limited capacity of the Bulgarian and Rumanian railway and road networks, the Marita build up and the Danube crossing were re-scheduled for the beginning of April.(34)

The view of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel of German strategy in the south-east corner of Europe is the following:

"Secondly, it is my view that it would have been better if we had kept our hands off Greece altogether, and rather created a concentration of strength in North Africa to drive the British right out of the Mediterranean area. The air forces we employed in Greece should have been used for the protection of convoys to Africa, and every possibility of gaining shipping space in the Mediterranean should have been exploited to the full. Malta should have been taken instead of Crete. Powerful German motorized forces in North Africa could then have taken the whole of the British-occupied Mediterranean coastline, which would have isolated south-eastern Europe. Greece, Yugoslavia and Crete would have had no choice but to submit, for supplies and support from the British Empire would have been impossible. The price in casualties of this scheme - which would not only have achieved our aims in south-east Europe, but would also have secured the Mediterranean area and the Near East as sources of oil and bases for attack on Russia - would not have been much greater than the price we did in fact have to pay in Greece, Yugoslavia, Crete and North Africa in the summer of 1941. But our superiors had inhibitions about undertaking any major operation in a theatre of war where supplies had to be brought up by the sea."(35)
The third phase of the Italo-Greek war is divided into two sub-phases: 1) the winter period from December 1940 until 9th March; and 2) the Italian spring attack of March 1941.

3c) Winter

During the first period, the focus is mainly on the Greek attack on the line Sevranin-Garonin-Spandarit-Boubesi-Sendeli-Golika-Klisura which resulted in the occupation of the mountain ranges of Sevranin-Garonin-Spandarit and of the Klisura pass, on the unsuccessful Italian local offensive against Klisura, north and south of the River Aoos, and on the successful Greek attack on Mount Sendeli and the area Metzigorani-Pestani-Goliko. The Italian High Command strengthened its forces in Albania with 10 new divisions plus Blackshirts making a total of 24 divisions. The Greek High Command for its part introduced three new divisions, bringing the total employed since the beginning of the war to 14 infantry divisions, 2 infantry brigades and 1 cavalry division. (36) See Maps 4, 5, 7

The Greeks attacked with the II Army Corps at the end of December. The I and XI Divisions and the V Brigade marched against the line Garonin-Podgorani and the Klisura road junction which was captured on 10th January, though the Italians put up a strong resistance, introducing new formations such as the 3rd and 5th Julia and Pusteria Alpini Divisions, and the 47th Bari, and 6th Cuneo Infantry Divisions. Italian retreat was absolutely certain however. The new Commander-in-Chief Cavallero, in an attempt to urge his divisions to fight to the last, sent a letter to the divisional commander of the Julia Division, General Girotti, stating that it was more than imperative that the gap be closed at all costs, otherwise the Italians would not be able to hold on to Albania a much longer. Cavallero implored Girotti to do his
duty for the country appealing to his patriotism and begging him to stand and fight and to die if necessary, alongside him. (37)

On 15th January, Rintelen reported to Hitler from Albania that the situation was very bleak indeed. There could be no successful offensive at all without more troops and more equipment. The terrain was rough, creating difficulties with the supply and transportation system. The cold was unbearable and food and clothing minimal. The ports were congested and ill-organised and lateral communications did not exist. However Rintelen predicted, quite rightly, that the Greeks, though in a better position than the Italians, were not able to muster a large-scale offensive due to the appalling weather and their own transportation problems. He calculated that the Italian front could be held on the existing line more or less, with some Greek successes but only at a local level. (38)

Rintelen himself had narrowly escaped capture when the Greeks stormed Klisura on 10th January. (39) Cervi writes, that the humiliation of the Italian divisions had reached the point where Italian troops joked and laughed at the Lupi (wolves) di Toscana Infantry Division, which due to its frequent and disorderly retreats was nicknamed the Lepri (hares) di Toscana. (40) See Maps 4,5,6,7

Following the fall of Klisura, the Italian High Command introduced new units into the battle to stall the Greek advance north of Garonin. The XV Greek Infantry Division, under the cover of a snowstorm, stormed and destroyed the 7th Lupi di Toscana Division and, together with the XI, crossed the River Apson and occupied the whole of the Spandarit area by 22nd January. To the west of that, the Greek I Division repulsed the Italian forces and reached the north of Mount Trembesina. New Italian units were identified in this area, such as the 24th Pinerolo Infantry Division, the 22nd Cacciatori delle Alpi (in Albania for the first time) plus
parts of the 37th Modena and the 51st Siena Infantry Divisions re-grouped and replenished. (41)

From 30th December 1940 until 25th January 1941, the Greek I, XV and XI Divisions, plus the V Brigade, had fought against seven Italian divisions of which four had been introduced to the front for the first time, while the rest had had time to re-group, re-organise and replenish, an advantage not enjoyed by the Greek formations to whom the rotation system could not be fully applied, because of the overall shortage of combat units. In addition to that, the Greek units faced quantitative Italian superiority in the air and in terms of special armament for mountain warfare (mountain artillery and mortars with raised trajectory angle curve). The Greek troops also had to cope with supply shortage and the lengthening of their lines of communication. (42)

During the above-mentioned period, operations were restricted in other sectors to local skirmishes, artillery exchanges and patrolling with the object of improving the Greek defence lines. Occasionally the enemy attacked to advance locally with tanks and infantry but his attempts failed. In the coastal zone, Italian warships sometimes bombed Greek positions, while the Italian air force, when weather permitted it, attacked Greek troops too. In the meantime, the V Division was moved into the Koritsa sector of the II Army Corps while the XVI Division was transported from Amynteion to Koritsa as well. In the same period due to the ceaseless action of the Greek divisions without a respite, most of them started to show signs of fatigue and lack of adequate reinforcements in men and material.

The V Brigade, due to its considerable losses, was dissolved and incorporated into the II Army Corps while the III Brigade and the Thesprotias Battle Group were incorporated into the I Army Corps. Thus the formation of the Greek units at the end of January 1941 was as follows: the W.M.A. with the III and V Army Corps, the latter being the re-named
Divisional Group K comprising the XIII, IX and X Divisions in the first line and the XVII in the second, plus the XVI division (two regiments) which was starting to arrive to relieve the X which needed urgent regrouping; the II Army Corps with the XI, XV and I Divisions in the first line and the V (Cretan) in the second; in Epirus, the I Army Corps with the II, VII and III Divisions; and finally, as a reserve for the whole Greek front, the Cavalry Division, the IV Division and the VI, which was transported from Eastern Macedonia to Koritsa. (43)

Metaxas was getting alarmed however over the slow pace of the Greek advance in Albania, which led him to urge Papagos to finish off the Italians, because of the fear of German intervention. (44) Another reason for concern within the Greek Government, apart from the Germans gathering in Rumania, was the shortage of mountain guns and the shortfall in ammunition production. (45) Greek's ammunition could maximally last for 3-4 months, until the middle of April, if they were not re-supplied by the British; and Metaxas, obviously under the strain of that grave problem, wrote in his diary on 3rd December “perhaps we should stop [advancing]?”. (46) It is the very first time we see, the leader of the Greeks thinking of holding back the Greek troops.

Meanwhile, at the front, the summit of Trembesina had been occupied by the Greeks, but they were forced by a snowstorm to withdraw to the eastern slopes of it. An Italian ski battalion of the Cervino Alpini Division exploited the storm and attacked the summit. Under this cover, units of the 58th Legnano Division pushed back the few Greek troops and attempted to capture Klisura. The II Army Corps sent a regiment of the V Division (Cretan) which pushed the Italians west of Trembesina by 30th January. The Italians, however, attacked south of the River Aoos aiming to pierce through the Klisura defile supported by armour, but failed. Other
frantic attacks of the Italian forces in the first ten days of February in the Boubesi area failed as well.\textsuperscript{(47)}

The strenuous efforts of the Italians to capture Klisura made it obvious to the Greek High Command that the Italians would soon commence another attack. It was essential therefore for the Greeks to clear and extend the security zone in the Klisura area. The bad weather and the high altitude however did not allow any further attack in the region. There had been a plan for a simultaneous offensive of the V and II Divisions to clear Klisura to be launched from both north and south of the River Aoos, but a sudden snowstorm caused the postponement of all operations until later in February.\textsuperscript{(48)} In the meantime, during the first days of February, the I and II Army Corps came under a united command, the Epirus Army (E.A.). Thus E.A. had in its ranks the II, III, IV and VIII Divisions in the I Army Corps and the I, V, XI, XV and XVII Divisions in the II Army Corps. The aim of the E.A was to coordinate with the W.M.A. operations for the capture of Valona.\textsuperscript{(49)}

On 13th February, the V Division attacked from the north of Trembesina towards Maritsai and occupied it within the day. The Italians, who consisted of the newly arrived 2nd Sforzesca Infantry Division and the Garibaldi Blackshirts Detachment, reacted vigorously and counter-attacked, but on 15th February the V Division occupied the Metzigorani and the north peak of Mount Sendeli.\textsuperscript{(50)} See Maps, 5,6,7

The right wing of the Greek II Division obtained successes and by 19th February had captured Peshtan and Mount Golik; and though the Italians mounted diversionary attacks especially in the area of the II Army Corps around Boubesi and Spandarit, the Greeks held on. The weather for once played the \textit{deus ex machina} role and saved the Italians from further Greek advance before they had attained all their objectives, which included the entire Sendeli area. On 7th and 8th March, the weather improved somewhat to allow restricted movement. The Greeks exploited this respite,
advancing into the Metzigorani area, which was occupied by the XVII Division. Local gains were made at the eastern end of the Klisura pass which extended the Klisura safety zone. (51) On the rest of the front, until 8th March there was only sporadic artillery fire and patrolling, which did not result in any change of position. (52)

On 20th December Metaxas and the German Minister met for the first time since the Italian invasion in Greece. Metaxas was afraid that in this meeting the Germans would possibly threaten Greece. On the contrary, the German diplomat was merely trying to obtain information about future Greek plans. Metaxas informed the German Minister that despite Greece's strict neutrality, she had been unjustifiably attacked by Italy. Metaxas warned the German Minister explicitly that Greece had no reason to threaten Germany, but that if Germany decided to move against Greece, he was going to resist that attack. However, Metaxas hoped that Germany would not act aggressively against Greece, so that he would have no reason to clash with her. Finally Metaxas informed Prince Viktor von Erbach-Schonburg that the Greek alliance with Britain was the basis of his policy - which was bound to alarm the Germans - and he repeated that to Palairet. (53)

It was not only Metaxas who was preoccupied with the slow progress of Greek operations; the British were too. The British military mission in Athens informed London that by January 1941 the front was almost at a standstill. That was the result of continuous Italian reinforcements consolidating Italian positions and of the increase in the Italian air force. The atrocious weather conditions and the lack of mobility and speed among the Greeks, due to their shortage of transport, hampered their operations. Thus the Albanian front in January remained basically static until the German invasion of Greece in April 1941. (54)

Making a judgement on the Greek strategy, Katheniotis in his official report cannot fail to point out that the General
Staff should have given the II Army Corps permission to proceed towards Pontgora because the conditions were favourable. In the same way, bad weather and lack of re-supply had led the General Staff not to order the I and II Army Corps to move towards Tepelene as soon as possible before the Italians had had any time to regroup. (55)

Katheniotis makes another point as well. Since Northern Greece and Albania were severely short of railway and road systems and large harbours to accommodate supplies, the General Staff should have ordered that the re-supply of the Greek forces at Tepelene take place also through smaller ports along the Epirotic coast of Greece, and of Albania, in order to ease the flow of provisions through the harbour of Santi Quaranta. Instead, the General Staff had ordered that the advance of the Greek forces to Tepelene should take place through the mountainous area of Trembesina-Sendeli which due to the height, the extreme cold and the absence of any infrastructure, made the supply situation of the Greek units at the front even worse. According to Katheniotis, if the II Army Corps had marched towards the west and not the north, the Tepelene road would have been accessible to the Greeks and both the I and the II Army Corps would have been supplied adequately by using the harbours of Greece and Albania in succession. (56)

Katheniotis goes on to argue that the attack on Sendeli by two regiments of the II Division on 13th February was lacking in impact. The position could not be taken due to shortage of men and ammunition. However, the real cause for the failure of the operation was the disregarding of the terrain, which was mountainous and covered with snow and so prevented the Greek forces remaining on the summit. If the Greeks had withdrawn to the slopes of Sendeli where the climate was milder, they could have managed to hold on. According to Katheniotis again, the General Staff misdirected the Albanian campaign and paid no attention to the future development of Greek strategy. Katheniotis believes that the
General Staff was totally ignorant of the situation at the front and was informed about it by the “newspapers”. Similarly the Greek High Command sacrificed, blamed but, most of all, scapegoated their subordinates and staff officers when they tried to question the causes of delay and slowness of the operations in Albania. (57)

Geramanis criticizes the General Staff for persisting in its demand to occupy Sendeli-Tepeleni while the temperature was dropping all the time and the terrain was rough. He suggests that by its unreasonable stubbornness the General Staff caused serious physical exhaustion among the two divisions of the II Army Corps, the I and XV, and weakened the V and XVII Divisions. That happened at a time when the Greek High Command was expecting an Italian spring attack. Consequently by the time of the Italian attack in March all the Greek units (I, XV, V, and XVII) were totally exhausted and disorganised, unable to withstand the forthcoming major Italian attack. The General Staff should have ordered the immediate relief of all those formations, even though there was a shortage of troops, and the adequate fortification of Trembesina so as to cover Klisura while transporting the IV Division to the area as a reserve unit. The successful Greek response to the Italian offensive in March was based entirely on the stubborn and heroic defence of the I and XV Divisions and to accurate Greek artillery fire which protected the exhausted infantry remnants of those divisions. (58)

Geramanis put the blame for the Greek failure to push the Italians out of Albania partly on the Greek Deputy Minister of War, General Nicholas Papademas, who favoured the Koritsa-Elbasan route instead of the Elea-Argyrokastron-Valona. (59) Kollopoulos says that as far as tactics were concerned Papagos followed a sound policy against the Italians, a policy which was missing when the Germans invaded Greece. (60)
The Mounting of the Primavera (Spring) Offensive

From 10th February 1941, the II Army Corps had through air and ground reconnaissance identified an increase in the Italian units in its sector, especially to the east and south of the Giava area. The continuous reinforcement with supplies and new forces of the Italians facing the II Army Corps, the widening of roads, the despatch of large quantities of ammunition indicated, as did information derived from prisoners, that the Italian High Command was planning something. Cavallero and Mussolini were preparing for the last Italian attack, known as the Primavera offensive, which signified the end of the Italian attempts to defeat the Greeks. See Maps 8, 9.

However, the Greek General Staff was not caught off guard. Not only had it carefully watched all the Italian preparations and the intense air activity for the few days before the opening of the attack, but on 9th February it had ordered the II Army Corps to fall back into a defensive mode, to reduce all its offensive operations (apart from local ones necessary to improve its own position), to replenish and re-supply its divisions, to fortify its position and most of all to rest its men. The Greek High Command had ordered the XVII and VI Divisions to move into the II Army Corps area to replace the battle-exhausted XV and I Divisions.

Simultaneously, the IV division was ordered to be ready in Argyrokastron to move, if need be, into the II Army Corps area. Most of all, as Cervi suggests, Papagos had a hidden ace up in his sleeve. The Italian offensive plans became known to the Greeks when an Italian officer was caught with them. Apparently the Italians were not aware of this.

The Italian military and political authorities desperately needed a victory. Mussolini's support had declined rapidly during all these months of Italian retreats in Albania as well as in Africa. He needed a victory to strengthen his position.
in Italy. But most of all, he pressed for a fast and vigorous action that would make the Greeks withdraw. He knew very well that the Germans were going to attack Greece in April and he was certain that the Greeks would not be able to withstand a German onslaught as they had the Italian. On the one hand, Mussolini believed that he could not persuade Hitler to postpone his attack on Greece, simply because each day that passed in March 1941, the British landed more forces in Greece, making it even more difficult for the Axis to defeat them. On the other hand, for the sake of the Italian army, Mussolini needed a glorious victory demonstrating that it was the Italians who had beaten the Greeks and not the Germans.(64)

The military objective of that Italian spring offensive was Janina. The whole operation was entrusted to the 11th Army, under General Geloso, which would attack on a concentrated front between the Rivers Apsos and Aoos in the general direction of Glava-Boubesi. The aim of the 11th Army was to open a corridor through the valley of River Desnizza. Curiously enough, no one had thought of informing the 9th Army, which was placed near the Yugoslav frontier on garrison duties. Cavallero points out that this was a grave military mistake since its assistance could have been helpful, even essential. The commander of the 9th Army General Pirzio Biroli learnt of the Primavera accidentally on the night of 8th March, one day before it commenced.(65)

The major assault, on a front of only 6 km, was assigned to General Gastone Gambara’s 8th Army Corps which included the Puglie, Pinerolo, Bari and Cagliari Divisions and two Blackshirts battalions placed, one on the right (west) of the Sforzesca Division of the 15th Army Corps and the other on the left (north) of the Cacciatori delle Alpi Division of the 4th Army Corps. In detail, the I Greek Division would take the brunt of the attack from the left, along the line Boubesi-Toskitsi-Bregou Memoulazit-Dras-e-Kars to Mali Garonin, in the centre, along the line Boubesi-Vinokazit-Balamban-Ponde
and on the right, along the line South Sisikout-Kiafe Lousit-Bregou Psari-Pontgorani. The Italians hoped to be able to achieve their objectives by a combination of a direct frontal assault and local outflanking actions after the corridor had been made. (66) See Maps 8, 9

The Italians believed that after the successful piercing of the front of the I Greek Division, between Trembesina and Boubesi, they would proceed to the Klisura road junction isolating the Greek V and the XVII Divisions in Trembesina and Sendeli and pushing back the XV and XI Divisions towards Garonin. In this way the Italians would open up the valley of the Desnizza and march through Aoos valley to Premeti, Leskovic, Merdjan and Erseka, in order to separate the northern from the southern front and advance to Janina. (67)

The Greek battle order at the eve of the Italian attack was as follows: in the zone of the II Army Corps, the XVII, V, I, XV and XI Divisions from the River Aoos to the River Apsos. Behind the front line, E.A. had in reserve three regiments to the rear of the Greek XV and XVII Divisions and one regiment of the VI Division north of Klisura. In the area of Limbohoros (east of Argyrokastron) the IV Division was deployed. The Italians had in the front line from north to south, the 59th Cagliari, the 22nd Cacciatori delle Alpi, and the 38th Puglie divisions, the 152 and 153 Blackshirts battalions and, on the Sisiput road, the 24th Pinerolo and the 2nd Sforzesca Divisions. On a second line the Italians deployed the 51st Siena and the 7th Lupi di Toscana Divisions, and as a reserve, close to Tepelene, the Piemonte Division and the 131st Centauro Armoured. Finally between the Rivers Apsos and Aoos, the Italians had positioned Bersiaglieri, Alpini and Blackshirt regiments totalling fifteen infantry battalions and two machine-gun battalions. (68)

The Italians were supported by approximately 400 planes. The Greek air force consisted at the end of January of approximately 14 Army Cooperation planes, 7 bombers and
28 fighters. But the presence of the Royal Air Force in Greece (to which I shall refer in the next chapter) made up somewhat for the small number of Greek aircraft.

3c3) The Deployment of the *Primavera* Offensive 9th-25th March 1941

The Italians attacked on the morning of 9th March under the personal supervision of the *Duce*. After an intense heavy artillery barrage accompanied by continuous air force bombing and strafing, the Italian infantry advanced on the Greek positions, especially in the area of the II Army Corps between Trembesina and Boubesi. According to Greek Army records, on a six kilometre front, in the sector of the I Division 100,000 artillery shells from 300 guns had fallen within two and a half hours, excluding the mortar fire. Telephone and telegraphic lines were abruptly and totally destroyed, while optical means of messages (heliographs) were made useless by thick dust and the whole front was lit up with huge fires while continuous deafening explosions were heard throughout. The ground was broken up, the trees were wiped out, and the terrain transformed into a gigantic desert moonscape. (69) See Maps 8, 9

But the Italians failed to pierce the Greek lines. On the rest of the front, west of the Aoos and east of the Apsos, the Italians made local diversionary attacks to induce the Greeks to move troops from the points of the main attack and thus weaken the Greek line of defence. But this deception, the only attempt made according to the plan, did not succeed because Greek intelligence was not fooled. (70)

The next day, the Italians attacked again in the Trembesina-Boubesi area, but all their attempts came to nothing. Over the rest of the front the enemy made diversionary attacks as well, both in the coastal sector and in the area of Nivitsa, west of the Aoos and east of the Apsos, all of them unsuccessful. On 11th March, the Italians
launched a well prepared assault against Sendeli and Trembesina-Boubesi with successive waves of large infantry formations, supported by heavy artillery fire, mortars and strong air cover. All their attacks were repulsed with numerous infantry losses. During the night of 11th-12th March, Italian infantry marched against Trembesina-Boubesi, supported as always by intense artillery shelling, but without succeeding in gaining anything at all. In the morning they resumed their charge but failed once more.(71)

The Italians were not disheartened so soon. They moved considerable forces along the Berat road and on 13th March attacked in strength in the Trembesina-Boubesi area. The attacks were supported by aircraft and artillery, and though the territory was fiercely disputed all day and night, the Italians did not manage to capture any ground.(72) On 15th March, the enemy accepted his inability to break through the Greek lines and therefore restricted himself to local attacks and artillery fire. For the next two days, the Italians kept bombarding the Greek positions with artillery only, without any infantry attacks. However, from morning to evening on the 18th, the Italians made seven successive assaults against the Pestani area, south of the Aoos, but failed again. Similarly on the 19th, the Italian infantrymen moved against Trembesina and Boubesi with the support of four tanks without any success.(73)

On the next two days, the attacks were again restricted to artillery fire only. But on the night of 21st March Italian troops attacked near Goliko; they were repulsed. The next day was a relatively quiet one with exchange of artillery fire only. But on the 23rd, the Italians attacked towards Sendeli, failing as usual to throw back the Greeks. During the night, the enemy made two powerful attempts in Boubesi but was unsuccessful throughout. The next day the Italians charged again and again against the Greeks in Boubesi, but after a hand to hand battle were repulsed. Finally, on 25th March, the last day of the Italian spring attack, the Italians moved
against Pestani and Sendeli without any success, while over the rest of the front intense artillery barrages were heard all day. (74)

Thus the powerful Italian spring attack came to as bitter an end as had any other Italian attempt to subdue Greece. It lasted until 25th March, but after the 15th it had passed its peak for from then onwards the Italians, having suffered tactical defeat, restricted the intensity and the ferocity of their attacks. The Greek forces which took part in the battle especially between the Rivers Apsos and Aoos lined up six divisions, the XI, XV, VI, I, V and XVII, of which the VI and part of XVII were engaged in the fighting only in the last few days. The IV Division which was deployed as a reserve formation near Cacavia, moved into the II Army Corps area, but it did not participate in the defence. The Italians on their side had used 12 divisions altogether (the 59th, 38th, 24th, 37th, 47th, 51st, 7th, 22nd and 2nd Infantry Divisions, the 3rd and 5th Alpini Divisions and the 131st Armoured), excluding Bersaglieri and Blackshirt battalions. In the main attack in the centre (Trembesina-Boubesi), the Italian High Command had deployed seven infantry divisions, the 59th Cagliari, 38th Puglie, 24th Pinerolo, 47th Bari, 51st Siena and 22nd Cacciatori delle Alpi and the 131st Centauro. (75)

The Italian air force had contributed significantly to the attack, as it had to the war effort between January and March 1941. During January 1941 it made 258 bomber attacks, 3 reconnaissance flights over the western coast of Greece and the islands of the Aegean and 75 reconnaissance flights over the front and the interior of Greece. In February, the Italian air force focused mainly on the front, making bombing and strafing attacks with 253 planes. In March 1941, the Italian airmen supported the Primavera offensive and bombed Greek cities with 190 aircraft. In the first months of the Italian attack on Greece, the enemy used more aircraft than later on. From January until March 1941, Greek anti-aircraft fire had brought down 18 Italian planes. (76)
Meanwhile the Greek submarine *Triton* had succeeded in sinking one Italian submarine in January 1941, and one transport ship, the *Carnia* of 5,451 tons, in March 1941. Apart from that, the Greek navy had continued its support for the army by carrying in March and the first part of April 8,740 men and 2,806 pack animals. In January and February the transportation figures had been 34,525 men and 1,803 pack animals, in addition to supplies, equipment, evacuation of wounded and carrying of prisoners, without a single loss. (77) In March the Greek destroyer *Psara* attacked an enemy submarine while the Greek torpedo-boat *Prousa* was lost early in April by air attack. The attacking planes were German and not Italian, though the German-Greek war had not started yet. (78)

From January to March 1941, the Greek air force undertook 464 fighter missions and 118 bomber missions. The Greek Army Cooperation and the Naval Cooperation air forces assisted against the adversary. Specifically the Naval Cooperation air forces (three squadrons) had up to April 1941 accomplished approximately 900 missions escorting convoys, transporting supplies, coastal patrolling and carrying out anti-submarine surveillance. (79)

Katheniotis in assessing the Italian attack and the Greek response to it, points out that the condition of the Greek divisions prior to the Italian offensive made it look unlikely that they would be able to withstand the Italian attack, due to the complete lack of such supplies as, food, drink, equipment, guns, ammunition, uniforms and medical equipment. The anti-aircraft units had no ammunition at all, and the same was true of the mountain artillery. Katheniotis believes that the unavailability of ammunition was not due to shortage as such but the General Staff's failures of logistical operational planning. Specifically, the II Army Corps which was to receive the Italian attack, was short of artillery shells, while the III Army Corps had abandoned
tons of shells to the enemy when it withdrew south of Koritsa to the village of Selenitsa.(80)

The Greek I Division, which was in the front line of Greek defence, started receiving ammunition only on 12th March, three days after the Italian attack had commenced, by which time it was barely able to hold its position. Katheniotis thinks that if it had not been for the British replenishing the Greek army with a variety of supplies, the Greek forces would not have been able to fight for so long.(81) However, the difficulty the Greek I Division had in standing firm and responding to the enemy pressure during the Primavera offensive was eased when the General Staff ordered it to use artillery shells according to its actual need, without the restriction on consumption which applied to all other Greek forces on the grounds of shortage of such shells.(82)

The reasons for the failure of the Primavera offensive are many. Firstly, the terrain did not favour frontal attacks and provided minimal cover to the assaulting waves of Italian infantry. Secondly, the magnificent fight of the Greek troops—though inferior in numbers of men and material—and their ability to fortify the Greek defence positions sufficiently to withstand the attack. The lack of training of the Italian officers and the inability of the Italian infantrymen to pierce the Greek lines constituted two other causes of the Italian defeat. In addition, in order to frighten the Greeks, the Italian troops launched mass attacks on enemy posts rather than infiltrating them, and so fell victim to the concentrated and accurate fire of the Greek artillery, mortars and infantry.(83)

Apart from the above problems, the Italian air force operated at a very high altitude for fear of the Greek and British air forces and anti-aircraft fire, thus being unable to support the infantry attacks by precision bombing on the Greeks. The excellent use of artillery and mortar fire by the Greeks, the low morale of the Italian army and their lack of experience in overrunning well-defended infantry positions
were also responsible for the Italian spring fiasco. (84) It is an illustration of low Italian morale that Carabinieri were posted at the rear of the advancing infantrymen and forced them by the threat of execution into the battle. The infantry had to march against the Greeks only because of the fear of execution and not because they actually wanted to. (85)

But even if the Italians had managed to break through the Greek lines locally, the Italian plan was very fragile, since it did not consider simultaneous attacks to the jaws of the salient they proposed to open (Trembesina-north slopes of Garonin). These two places were natural strongholds; and if they were not taken by the Italians, they would always constitute a major threat to both the flanks of the advancing Italians. If the Italian attack was successful and the gap was opened up, the Greeks could always have launched a counter-attack from one of these two places, if not both, the result of which would have been to break through the Italian lines, rout them, and put an end to their advance. (86)

The Italians should have attacked on the most favourable line, Mali Spandarit-Kiafe Sofiout-Mali Garonin-Mali Topogianit. If they had done that, they would have had more chance of threatening the right of the II Army Corps. By advancing against the right of the II Army Corps, the Italians might have thrown the whole Greek line north of the Aoos, back to Klisura and forced the Greeks to make a hasty retreat to the west. In this way the Italian advance would have brought a mortal threat to the Greeks in Trembesina and Sendeli. The same direction had been used by the II Army Corps when, in January 1941 and in worse weather conditions than in March, it made its advance against the Italians in Klisura and the Desnizza valley forcing them to abandon both places. (87)

By the end of March 1941, Mussolini could do nothing but adopt the pitiful stance of waiting for Hitler’s armies to come and save his neck.
3d) Unholy Alliance?

Were there any possibilities for an armistice between Greece and Italy through the mediation of Germany? It is without doubt certain that pro-German elements existed in Greece before and throughout the Italian attack. Metaxas himself was informed of some high ranking officials that they were pro-German. In his diary on 5th July 1940, he mentioned the possibility of a Minister (Kotzias), a General (Plates) and an Admiral (?) who were pro-German. As mentioned in the previous chapter too, in different diary entries Metaxas commented on Mavroudis' actions and attitude towards Germany, as openly pro-German and not wholly patriotic.

Metaxas, however, assured the British Minister that in the event of a German invasion, Greece would fight on no matter what. On 7th December 1940, the British Minister telegraphed to Foreign Office that "he said most emphatically that he would never agree to any attempt to drive wedge between Great Britain and Greece". Metaxas also informed Palairet that Greece, after knocking out Italy, would turn its attention to Germany, with Britain's assistance.

Did Metaxas truly mean what he said to Palairet? In viewing the possibility of an armistice between Greece and Italy through German mediation, we must look it from two different angles. The first deals with the German initiative towards Greece, to intervene between the two enemies; and the other, with the Greek request to Germany to intervene between Greece and Italy. We will review them in that order, since that is the order in which they occurred.

The Germans did not want to invade Greece militarily, if there was another way to settle the whole affair. If the right flank of the German army advancing to Russia could be secured through diplomatic-political means rather than war, so much the better for Germany, which would not have to
commit forces on another front, the Balkans. General Franz Halder, Chief of German Army General Staff, wrote in his diary on 5th December 1940, that the

"Greeks do not wish a conflict with us through the British.... If the Greeks do not evict the British, we will be forced into a Bulgarian action. It is possible that this understanding dawns on the Greeks, especially if the Italians should leave Albania.... Should the Greeks remove the British, there would be no necessity for our attack.... It is possible that, given the altered strength relationship, the Greeks might accept lower Italian demands." (92)

It is obvious, therefore, that Germany was preoccupied with the British danger in Greece, more than with the actual Italo-Greek conflict. If that British danger could be eliminated, then there was no reason for Germany to invade Greece, so long as the Italo-Greek limited war could be solved by other means. There is no precise evidence of the origin of the initiative for an intercession, but it seems that it must have come from Germany in the first place. As early as 14th November 1940, the Greek Naval Attaché in Berlin reported to the Greek Government that Germany intended to attack Greece, to assist the Italians and provide aid for Graziani in Egypt, but before that "Germany will try to solve the issue peacefully by coming to an agreement with a new Greek Government and Crown Prince Paul" (author's emphasis). (93)

On 20th January, an official of the Greek Ministry of Public Safety met with a representative of the Gestapo in the Balkans, who had come to Athens from Sofia. The man was called Glas Frintoli [Γκάλας Φρίντολι]. In the discussion that followed, Frintoli said that Germany wished to discuss with Greece a plan for peace on terms favourable to her, provided that the British were thrown out of Greece. The aim was not to ask Italy, but to present her with an accomplished fact. Germany would force Italy to stop the attack on Greece and to remove her troops from Albania allowing Greece to hold
on to the territory she held so far. Otherwise, Germany would be forced to attack Greece through Bulgaria, to defeat the British and thus ensure the security of the Ploesti oilfields. Frintoli suggested that Greece should grasp that opportunity for peace right now because it had very little time to act before Germany was forced to invade. Frintoli informed his interlocutor that Greece should not expect any help from Turkey or Yugoslavia.

Similarly, another attempt at German intervention was made in an approach to the Greek Military Attaché in Belgrade, Colonel C. Oekonomou by his German colleague on 18th February 1941. The German Military Attaché Colonel Tussain criticized the Italian mistake in Greece. Tussain assured Oekonomou that Hitler was very pro-Greek and he did not wish to attack Greece, but he would be forced to do so, due to the British presence there. He went on to say that Greece could save herself from devastation by arranging an Italo-Greek armistice.

His Greek colleague answered that this could never happen because the British would immediately blockade Greece and occupy her islands. However, the German Attaché proposed that Bulgaria must be given an outlet to the Aegean. According to him, if Greece would take the whole of the South of Albania up to Valona and surrender to Bulgaria the whole of Eastern Macedonia as far as Alexandroupolis, then the issue could be solved diplomatically. Oekonomou cut short his colleague and answered emphatically that Greece would never agree to give away anything at all to Bulgaria.

A very important piece of evidence concerning the Greek response to German mediation, is information now available from the Turkish embassy in Athens, to the effect that Germany had proposed to Metaxas that Greece should sign an armistice with Italy and keep its gains in Albania, otherwise Germany would attack her. Metaxas replied that under no condition was Greece going to betray Britain and that Greece
would fight on to total victory or defeat. (96) That is what Metaxas had always implied to Palairet as the latter telegraphed to London on 16th December 1940, i.e. "that he was prepared to meet the German menace in alliance with us [Britain] as soon as Italian danger was removed." (97)

When the Greek Minister in Berlin, Alexander Rangaves, suggested that Greece should ask Hitler to mediate between Greece and Italy, Metaxas criticized him as a coward and immoral. (98) "He [Rangaves] advises us to plead with Hitler and ask for peace with Italy, in other words to disgrace ourselves. He is vile and foolish. It is much better to die." (99) That is precisely what he wrote back to him on 4th January.

On 11th January 1941, the British Minister in Belgrade, Mr. Ronald Campbell, reported back to London that the Germans were favourably disposed towards Greece and would not invade her if she made peace, but otherwise they would force her to do so. The Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Affairs had advised the Greek Minister in Belgrade that Greece should take advantage of this momentary favourable disposition of Germany towards Greece and not reject the German proposals for peace. (100)

Additional indirect approaches to the Greek Government were made through other diplomatic channels. On 17th December the Hungarian Minister in Madrid, General Antorka approached his Greek colleague P. Argyropoulos on behalf of a German official (possibly the German Ambassador in Madrid and/or Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, of Greek ancestry, the Head of the Abwehr) and informed him that Germany was seeking peace between Greece and Italy. According to the proposed peace terms, German troops would place themselves between the Greek and Italian troops in Albania, while the Greeks would keep all the territory they had occupied so far. The only condition was that the British must evacuate Greece immediately. Argyropoulos replied that an
Italo-Greek peace was not good for Greece; only the total defeat of Italy was. (101)

The Greek Minister informed Athens of this meeting and suggested to Metaxas that he accept the proposal so as to save Greece from destruction. However, by the time of Metaxas’ death in January 1941, he had received no answer to his suggestion, while the Greek Cabinet rejected the proposal and Metaxas informed the Germans that any such proposals, must come in the future through the regular diplomatic channels. (102)

Similar overtures were made to Rangaves in Berlin in February 1941, and at much the same time by the German Ambassador in Ankara, Franz von Papen, to his Greek colleague with the terms that Greece would keep her gains in Albania, drive out the British and allow the Germans to occupy some parts of Greece. (103) Finally the German Cultural Attaché in Athens approached the Chief of Greek Internal Security Constantine Maniadakis, with a similar offer; but nothing came of all these repetitive attempts, at least not officially.

The reasons why not cannot be so difficult to guess. Metaxas and his Cabinet must have had a fair knowledge of what was going on. Possibly they believed that the German proposals were both insincere and dangerous. But more than that, the German offers came at a time when Greece was advancing in Albania, winning against a major Power and possibly, why not, throwing its soldiers out of Albania altogether. As van Creveld suggests, it is possible therefore, that at the time when all these German attempts were circulating around Athens, they did not really impress Metaxas, since his army was still victorious and though the German troop gathering in Rumania was alarming, it seemed, still, very distant. The Greeks were “wholly immersed in their own little war against Italy”. (104)

It seems that Metaxas and his Ministers wanted to fight to the bitter end to humiliate the Italians, could not envisage a
German attack on Greece and wished to avert any possibility of one. That is why they insisted so stubbornly that all the British assistance in Greece should be deployed against the Italians in Albania only. The Greeks wanted to have their cake and eat it too. Van Creveld goes on to say that the Greeks welcomed British military assistance as long as it helped to ridicule the Italians in Albania but not if it might provoke a German invasion against themselves. Unfortunately the one brought the other.(105)

There is however another possible reason. It is clear from his diary that Metaxas could see the German danger overshadowing his country, and he knew very well the outcome of such a duel with Germany, on top of the Italians in Albania. Since the Greek front was more or less stabilised by mid-January, Metaxas was more than able to understand that Greece could never throw the Italians into the sea, especially if Germany intervened to save them. He still hesitated to accept the German offers of mediation, even though they contained the best possible terms for Greece, simply because he was afraid of the British response to such a Greek move.

Surely the British would not have stood idly by and see, Greece terminate the war with Italy, come to an agreement with Germany and throw them out of Greece. Britain would have reacted dynamically, forcing itself upon Greece, militarily if necessary, to stop herself being expelled from Greece.(106) Thus Metaxas found himself between the devil and the deep blue sea: either to accept the German proposals and have Greece threatened or even occupied by the British, or to carry on with the war against the Italians and have his country occupied by the Germans after provoking a German attack on Greece by having British troops in the country. He preferred or was forced to accept (?) the latter.

Metaxas was right indeed in assessing the British reaction. Britain did not welcome at all the possibility of an Italo-Greek armistice. The Italo-Greek war tied down considerable
Italian forces, forces that could have been deployed in North Africa against the British if Greece freed them from Albania by concluding an armistice. Apart from that, Britain through its military presence in Greece gained important air and naval bases in Crete and mainland Greece from which it could potentially bomb the Ploesti oil-fields and Northern Italy. If Greece came to an agreement with Italy, the British would have had either to withdraw voluntarily or be expelled. Then Greece would return to neutrality, or in the very worst case scenario, join the Axis possibly under German threat, though this was a far distant possibility. The British would in this way immediately lose all their bases in Greece, and with them the potential for Britain to embark herself on a Balkan campaign. (107) The very worst case could be that Greek bases could be given to the Axis in Germany's peripheral strategy against Britain's positions in the Mediterranean. There is no need to explain what the latter would mean for Britain and the course of war, though this is what happened in the end.

Thus the British Minister was asked to ensure that Greece did not conclude a separate peace with Italy without committing Britain to any specific promises or undertakings of aid to Greece. (108)

The British Foreign Office had thought of various ways to block the possibility of Greece making a separate peace. Since the attitude of Greece towards a peace with Italy depended on Britain's military ability to continue to supply Greece with the means to wage war against the Italians, military help could be promised to Greece (whether or not Britain was able to supply it). Hopefully Greece and Metaxas would accept the British proposal for military aid and maintain a firm resistance to the extremely appealing German offers. If, on the other hand, Greece demanded that the British provide the promised help and they could not do so, then the British would have to extricate themselves from mainland Greece in the event of a separate peace, but must
at all costs keep Suda Bay in Crete and the other British naval and air bases in the other Greek islands. (109)

The other course was to provoke the Germans into an act of aggression against Greece, and the best way to do this was by the speedy establishment of British forces in Greece. (110) In this way, the Germans would be provoked to invade Greece to expel the British, and this would keep Greece in the war. Consequently, the despatch of British troops in Greece in March 1941 to deal with the prospective German invasion was partly a British device to provoke the Germans to commit an act of aggression against Greece, so making it impossible for her to conclude a separate peace treaty with anyone. (111)

There was a third possibility: to induce Metaxas to sign a formal military alliance with Britain aimed at the total defeat of Germany and thus to tie Greece to Britain until the end of the war. This would have required specific military duties and responsibilities on Britain’s part towards Greece and was considered most unwelcome. That is why Palairet was extremely happy when Metaxas told him, of his own free will, that even if Germany did not declare war on Greece, Greece would declare war on her. Palairet was even more pleased when Metaxas assured him that he was ready to provoke Germany when the time was ripe and that the war would not end until the total annihilation of the Axis. There could be no peace. (112) Palairet very wisely abstained from asking Metaxas what Greece might require in military terms from Britain in order to fight the war until the defeat of the Axis. Metaxas was put into a deadlock. On the one hand he welcomed the German mediation; and on the other, for the above reasons, he was forced to turn his back on it.

Let us now examine the Greek approach to Germany for intercession. Koliopoulos indicates that George Pesmatzoglou, owner of newspaper Proia and a known pro-German according to a British (Intelligence) Service report from Turkey (113) and a close friend and political associate of
Metaxas, was sent by him to Berlin in December 1940 on a secret mission to approach the Germans for mediation. According to Metaxas wishes, the Greco-Italian war would come to an end with the British leaving Greece on Metaxas request and the Greeks keeping the Albanian territorial gains for themselves. But the Germans were doubtful whether the British would be persuaded to evacuate Greece, even if the war ended with Italy, so they did not pursue the matter. (114)

Similarly, Spiros Linardatos claims that the German Minister in Athens sent a telegram to Berlin on 12th March 1941, forwarding a report of the German Vice-Counsellor in Salonika. According to that report, Colonel Petines, Chief of Staff of a large Greek fighting formation, visited Paulus, the German secretary in the consulate in Salonika and informed him that he was coming on behalf of his superior officer whose name he could not reveal for obvious reasons, though he was very pro-German. The instructions he had were that the Greek army in Albania was willing to stop the war against the Italians, if the Germans interposed themselves between the Greeks and the Italians in Albania and if the Germans did not invade Greece. If the Germans decided to attack Greece, the Greek army would see it as a direct aid to the Italians in Albania, and would be forced to fight. The Greeks would keep their gains in Albania and force the British out of Greece. The report does not mention how, but presumably by fighting. The German Minister commented that the superior officer must be General George Tsolakoglou, and that his approach to the Germans must be an independent action. (115)

The Greek newspaper Vema published an article on 16/2/63 claiming that the ex-Minister Merkouris had two meetings on 11th and 15th March 1941 with the German Military Attaché in Athens, by the order of the Greek Government and the King. The political authorities in Greece wanted the termination of the hostilities in Albania and the
rapid withdrawal of the British from Greece in order to avert the German attack. The only condition was that the initiative for peace should come from Germany and not Greece, so as not to make Greece appear a traitor to the British since she was their ally and had already accepted the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F).(116)

Papagos claims that the unofficial Greek military appeals to Germany were the result of German propaganda in Greece circulating the rumour that Germany sought the end of the war with terms favourable to Greece, including its enlargement. German propaganda allegedly had a detrimental effect by weakening morale among the Greek troops and their commanders who sought a mediation for the termination of the hostilities and an honourable peace for Greece, because they considered the continuation of the war as harmful and pointless.(117)

Other Greek approaches to Germany for intercession include the approach to the German Minister in Athens by General Theodoros Pangalos who proposed to establish a pro-Axis government in Greece, overthrow the new Premier Alexander Koryzis and bring the war with Italy to an end, with the aid of Germany. Mavroudis also proposed to the Germans the withdrawal of the British from Greece and the conclusion of an honourable peace with Italy.(118)

On 18th March, Rangaves approached Canaris and Weizsacker and proposed to assist in the termination of the Italo-Greek war and the continuation of the Greco-German peace. He also told Weizsacker that he had come on his own initiative without any instructions from his government. Rangaves tried to send a memorandum with his proposals and ideas to Hitler, but he failed to get it delivered to him, since Keitel intervened and blocked Rangaves' proposals. Finally on 21st March Joachim von Ribbentrop received a memorandum from Rangaves on the same issue but he returned it to him with the comment "Now is too late".(119)
Ribbentrop had already written a draft telegram destined to Rangaves and the German legation in Athens which ended:

"The Greek government.....is mistaken if it assumes that it can pass on to us the responsibility for taking the initiative in terminating the conflict. In particular, however, it seems to harbor illusions concerning the price which it would have to pay for such a termination. Of course, no approach of any kind should be made to officials there [Athens]." (120)

On 4th January 1941 the German Minister in Athens in a telegram to Berlin (No. 127) reported the personal intervention of Crown Prince Paul for the termination of the war in Albania. According to the telegram, Paul wanted Germany not to attack Greece, and said that Greece would like to end the fighting with Italy, even without claiming the territory gained so far in Albania. Germany would guarantee Greece's independence and security from a future Italian attack. Finally the heir to the Greek throne said that the King of Greece was not an enemy of Germany, and he had agreed to British assistance in Greece only after the utmost point of endurance had been reached. The pro-German feelings of Paul had not changed. (121)

The question that arises now is this: Why were leading Greeks suddenly agreeing in February and March 1941, while the British were landed in Greece's ports, to proceed with negotiations with Germany for the termination of hostilities on even less favourable terms than in November, December and January when Germany approached Greece?

Metaxas had died at the end of January and Alexander Koryzis had taken over. Koryzis was a banker by profession, not a politician or a military man like Metaxas. According to Koliopoulos, he was very honest and a patriot, but he lacked all the abilities essential to run the country. He was unfortunately weak in will and determination at a time when strength was absolutely necessary. (122)
Many other hypotheses can be made. It is possible that Koryzis, intimidated by the German danger knocking at his country's door, hastily sought for peace on whatever terms, hoping to avert the German onslaught in the nick of time. Alternatively, the Greek political and military leadership, had perhaps, anticipated finishing the Italians off quickly and then turning their attention to the Germans; this was now out of the question. Greece would never manage to drive the Italians into the sea, even if she had all the time in the world, which she did not, since Italy had reinforced her troops in Albania significantly and the Greeks had been weakened by the prolongation of the hostilities, their lack of supplies and transport, the winter conditions and the physical fatigue of the troops. The Greek troops had been fighting for six months continuously in appalling climatic conditions without having any fresh forces to replace them, almost non-existent reserves and without the Italian luxury of ample supplies and divisions. Possibly therefore, Koryzis tried to end the fighting as quickly as possible by appealing to Germany on the best terms he could achieve, while he still had time.

There was another factor also that preoccupied Greece. Greece realised that Turkey would stay neutral in a German attack on Greece, even through Bulgaria, while it was very unsafe to rely on Yugoslavia which had not clarified her attitude in relation to a German attack in the Balkans. Greece could not expect assistance from either of her two Balkan allies. Her old, traditional friend, Britain was her only consolation. Yet what use was Britain's "mighty" and well-renowned army? Two and a half divisions in Greece against a whole German army. It was perhaps obvious to Greece that even with Britain's tiny forces and the best luck, she still could not escape occupation. Thus, as early as the beginning of 1941 and as late as March 1941, while the British were landing in Piraeus, Greece tried to save herself from the
oncoming destruction which Britain was not able to stop. (123)

Geramanis claims that despite the Anglo-Greek agreement to fight the Germans, Greece could have concluded a separate peace with Italy even as late as March 1941, without being reproached by the Allies for treachery, since the Germans would not have possibly (?) exacted territorial gains in Greece as a condition of peace. The Germans would in that case have been unable to use Greek territorial space to inflict damage on the possessions of Britain in the Mediterranean. If Greece, on the contrary, had been occupied by the Germans, as ultimately was the case, even after a heroic fight, the dangers to Britain would have become greater, since the Axis had the whole of mainland and island Greece in its hands to turn them into bases against Britain in the Mediterranean and North Africa. (124)

But why did Germany allegedly reject the Greek appeals?. Perhaps because it was too late, as Ribbentrop had replied. In February and March 1941, everything was ready for Operations Marita and Barbarossa and nothing could postpone them. Why Germany should grant a favour to Greece, now that she had the upper hand indeed?. There was no reason.

It was Germany's turn, as it had been Greece's during the winter, to cut short all the attempts at mediation. She had determined to finish Greece off. Nothing could stand in the way for the liquidation of that small country. No appeals from anyone. (125)

It is possible also, that the Germans did not believe that the Greeks would be able to throw out of their country the British, once a separate Italo-Greek treaty had been signed. In addition the Germans possibly believed that the Greek attempts for an end of the Italo-Greek war, were not sincere or at least did not have the backing of the official Greek Government. On 19th February 1941, Koryzis sent a telegram to the Greek Minister in Berlin with a single phrase in it: "We shall fight". (126) It was indeed too late.
It should be noted that in the Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D volume XI, there is an Editor's note: Though evidence found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States 1940* and secondary sources, suggest that there were attempts from both Greece and Germany for a reconciliation, there were no relevant records found in the German Foreign Ministry files.(127)
Chapter 4
Greece in search of Allies 1939-1940: Supported But Still Exposed

4a) 1939-1940 Allied Plans for a Balkan Bloc

Before we look into the British decision to assist Greece militarily in 1941, and the Greek response, we should investigate chronologically the British (and French) war planning prior to Greek entry into the Second World War.

As early as April 1939, following the Italian landing in Albania, Britain and France had guaranteed the independence of Greece, though Churchill had warned the House of Commons that the British fleet was dangerously dispersed in the Mediterranean and it would be difficult to strike a decisive blow against the Italian navy, if that proved necessary. (1) Quite soon, however, a wedge was created between the British and the French strategy concerning the south-eastern corner of Europe. The French were anxious to draw the fighting from the west to the south-east and possibly induce the Balkan states to join in, thus adding to the total numbers on the Allied side. (2) The British, on the other hand, did not welcome this prospect.

They had as their first objective the defence of Turkey and the Straits, rather than of Greece. The British thought that any Allied intervention in the Balkans and primarily in Salonika or Istanbul, as the French proposed, would put a heavy burden on the already over-stretched Allied navies and merchant shipping while any successful Allied bridgehead in Salonika depended on the attitude of Turkey and Italy. (3) The Allies therefore decided not to undertake any operation in the Balkans to construct the so-called Allied "act of cement" that would take the place of the Balkan bloc against any German aggression in the south-east. (4)

The Anglo-Franco-Turkish Agreement of May 1939 and the subsequent Alliance of October did little to increase Balkan security. Turkey, though bound by previous agreements to
assist Greece if she was involved in a war, pleaded inability to assist Britain, France and Greece militarily once the Second World War broke out. In the meantime the Greek General Staff contacted the Allied military attachés in Greece in order to inform them about the Balkan situation and Greek military measures, but mostly to make it clear to them that unless Greece was quickly and sufficiently supported militarily by the Allies, she would not be able to withstand an attack. In that context General Maxime Weygand, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces in Syria, told the Greek Minister in Paris that he hoped to be able to come to Athens and discuss such matters with his Greek colleagues. However the Greeks did not allow that wish to be fulfilled, for they were afraid that such a visit might alarm the Axis. In September 1939, the Greek General Staff alarmed by the Italian troop concentrations in Albania, and wishing to cooperate more closely with the Allies, decided to despatch Lieutenant-Colonel Constantine Dovas to contact General Weygand in Ankara, and to discuss with him the possibilities of a Balkan military bloc.

At that meeting, General Weygand expressed his wish for the establishment of a Balkan front and proposed that Greece should take the initiative and cooperate with Yugoslavia and Turkey to that end. He also informed Dovas that French forces in Syria were quite inadequate to undertake the role of reinforcing Greece, unless they were increased. He requested that French officers in civilian clothing be allowed to visit Salonika and make preparations for a Balkan front but the Greek Government turned down that proposal, again to avoid alarming the Axis. Lieutenant-Colonel Dovas told General Weygand that Greece was short of war material, something that Papagos stressed many times to the military attachés of Britain and France in Athens. While Dovas was in Ankara he visited the Turkish Chief of Staff, Field Marshal Fevzi Chakmak who told him that Turkey was willing to increase the number of Turkish troops facing Bulgaria by
80 battalions up to 200. That would allow Greece to turn its attention towards Italy without being so much afraid as before of an attack by Bulgaria with or without the Italians. Even if that combined attack took place, that increase in Turkish formations was considered by the Greek General Staff sufficient to hold the Bulgarians for some time.

The French, however, stressed to the British the importance of the Balkan bloc. Neville Chamberlain, differing from his French colleague, Edouard Daladier, pointed out that the Anglo-French forces were too weak to prepare and execute an operation such as the landing of troops in Salonika. Anyway, nothing could be done since the Balkan countries were still neutral.(6)

At the same time, British foreign policy was also orientated towards the Middle East and the Far East which were considered of far greater importance than the Balkan peninsula. Italian neutrality was considered vital in order to secure the Balkans tranquil and that could not be taken for granted. Also, Germany could easily shift forces to South-Eastern Europe in the event of an Allied landing there, since "the train always beats the ship". Finally, Chamberlain was anxious not to provoke Italy and forge the Axis ties even closer by aiding the Balkans behind her back.

Chamberlain proposed that before any such Allied contingency plan was implemented in the Balkans, Italy should be consulted. It seems that British foreign policy regarding the Balkans became increasingly inactive and uneasy when it came to any clash with Italy. Britain was attempting to draw Italy away from Germany. The French insisted on the need for direct military and diplomatic involvement with the Balkan nations, as a prologue to a later Allied force in place, which would assist the Balkan states to resist a possible German menace.(7) However at the time, in contrast to their position in the First World War, the British did not consider Salonika a suitable base for large military operations, due to its poor communications, its bad
climatic conditions and the possibility of widespread malaria. In addition, Salonika was very close to the Greek borders, allowing a very small depth between the frontier line and the sea, in case of a strategic withdrawal, and also bringing it within easy striking distance of Bulgarian airfields. Insufficient harbour facilities and lack of modern airfields contributed to the British negative attitude.

Weygand, on the other hand, was hoping to form two divisions which could be shipped to Salonika. But the British War Cabinet decided that such a plan was out of the question, because first of all it would violate Greek neutrality and anyway it would stir up more problems in the Balkans than it would solve. Nevertheless in December 1939 the Allies decided that, given the possibility of a confrontation with Germany in South-Eastern Europe, and of their apparently improved relations with Italy, they could encourage the Balkan states to resist aggression by supplying them with some of the war material they needed.

Meanwhile, at the end of November 1939, two high-ranking Turkish officials arrived in Athens to discuss with the Greek General Staff the Allied response to a Balkan bloc. Prior to that visit the Turkish Government had been in close contact with the Allies about the possibility of such a bloc. So the two Turkish officials were able to inform Papagos that Britain and France were willing to send 4 or 5 divisions to Salonika and that Turkey would help in the transportation of these troops, via her territory, if landing them in Greece proved to be difficult. The Allied General Staffs desired the rapid construction of stockpiles and storage dumps, as well as the enlargement of harbour capacity, to assist the despatch of the Allied Expeditionary Force to Salonika. Papagos said in reply that the military preparedness of Greece was based primarily on British and French military equipment (including vital aeroplanes and anti-aircraft guns) which had not yet been supplied to Greece in sufficient numbers.
Papagos went on to say that the Allied fleets should, in the event of an attack on Greece, cooperate with the Greek navy to speed up Greek mobilisation. He added that the despatch of mere 4 or 5 Allied divisions would be inadequate if such a move was not followed by the despatch of those aeroplanes and anti-aircraft guns. These would be urgently needed to ensure that the Allied troops could disembark, and their supplies and equipment be landed and stockpiled, without fear of enemy air attacks. Similarly, Papagos said that the transportation of the Allied contingent along with its supplies and equipment should take place after completion of the Greek mobilisation, for otherwise the Greek communication and transportation system would already be stretched to the limit and would not be able to sustain the Allied landing. The result would be a breakdown of the infrastructure and cause the delay of both the Greek and the Allied mobilisation. The Greek Commander-in-Chief explained that Greece could not allow stockpiling of Allied supplies anywhere in Greece, before the country was at war. If such a thing took place Greece could be accused of breaching her strict neutrality in favour of the Allies, with grave results for her and the Allied camp.

The Turkish Chief of the General Staff, to whom Papagos' ideas were conveyed, agreed but added that the Allied landing should take place concurrently with Greek mobilisation because he feared that the Bulgarian army could drive a wedge between Turkish and Greek forces, while the latter was in the process of being mobilised and could then exploit that gap. If, on the other hand the Allied troops were in Salonika, they would cover the Greek mobilisation and deny the Bulgarians space to move. Papagos replied, that if the Allied landing took place concurrently with the Greek mobilisation, the former would delay and obstruct the latter, since the Allies would have had to use the Greek infrastructure - which would have been already congested due to the Greek mobilisation - to transport their troops and
supplies. Additionally, Papagos said, that Allied troops could always reinforce the Turkish army in Eastern Thrace as long as that did not delay the Turkish mobilisation, and together with the Turkish forces there, act as a barrier to any Bulgarian attempt to drive a wedge between the two Balkan armies.

In December 1939 a French Lieutenant-Colonel Mariot arrived in Athens to see Papagos and convey to him the ideas of the French Commander-in-Chief General Gamelin. Mariot told Papagos that the Allies would assist Greece immediately the situation arose, but Papagos replied that the maximum effectiveness of such intervention depended on his country being supplied with arms that the Allies had not yet delivered. In his book *The Battle of Greece 1940-1941* Papagos commented that the Allies did not enter into any substantive or concrete agreement with Greece in relation to the Balkan bloc. Through their military attachés in Greece, they gathered all sorts of information regarding the war capabilities of Greece without concerting a specific war plan with the Greek General Staff. Thus, this whole period of contacts between Greeks and Allies resulted in mere discussions, future plans and possibilities, but not in actual cooperation which could have protected Greece and helped the Allied cause.

Greek contacts with the Allies continued throughout 1939 and 1940 down to the French collapse, through French representatives mainly; but they ended in dismay for the Greeks. The French plan aimed at blocking German and Russian influence but most of all any attempts at occupying the Straits, of the Balkans or of any outlet to the Mediterranean. For these reasons, the French were mainly hoping to create the Balkan bloc which could have provided approximately 100 divisions (Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece and Turkey) and in this way put pressure on the Germans in Southern-Eastern Europe, forcing them to withdraw considerable forces from the western theatre. Of course these
In the end, the German attack on France in May 1940, and her rapid collapse, brought an abrupt end to any Greek aspiration to Balkan solidarity against the Germans.(14) As will be shown later on, the British stubborn refusal to establish a Balkan bloc as early as 1939 or even 1940, when there was still time, was to become a serious liability for the Anglo-Greek alliance of 1941.

Before we proceed any further to the Allied war planning and aims concerning Greece, we shall examine the Greco-Yugoslav relations and attempts at military cooperation against Italy. Greece and Yugoslavia were both members of the Balkan Pact of 1934. However, the Italian capture of Albania in April 1939 caused alarm to both the Yugoslav and the Greek camp. Rumours existed of an Italian attack on Greek islands; Italian troop exercises near the Yugoslav border made the Yugoslav Government suspicious of Italian intentions.

Therefore, following the Italian attack on Albania, the Yugoslav General Staff informed their Greek colleagues through the Greek Military Attaché in Belgrade that they would be interested in Greco-Yugoslav cooperation in the event of an Italian move with the assistance of Bulgaria against their two countries. However, the Yugoslav side restricted the whole affair to the study of a mere contingency, instead of establishing a close Greco-Yugoslav military alliance or agreement.(15) General Papagos' reply to the Yugoslav Staff was that he was willing to cooperate with them in the event of an Italian attack on Greece or Yugoslavia but he added that such cooperation should be
based on a political and military agreement. However, the Yugoslavs did not reply to Papagos' proposal.

Papagos' own explanation of the peculiar Yugoslav initiative and the sudden silence thereafter is that the Yugoslavs were in their initial alarm at the Italians taking up position in Albania and at rumours circulating about an impending Italian attack on Greece or Yugoslavia. They wanted to find out what Greek intentions and capabilities would be in a conflict. However, the Yugoslavs, uneasy though they were about the Italians, and tempted though they were to conclude a specific political and military agreement with Greece, were afraid to do so simply because such a step would bring them in direct confrontation with the Axis, and specifically with the Italians, whom the Yugoslavs, like the Greeks, did not want to provoke.(16)

During 1940, when the Italian forces in Albania had increased and the Second World War had started, the Yugoslav Minister in Athens had requested from Metaxas Greece's military help if his country was attacked by Italy. Metaxas replied that this was possible only if Yugoslavia assisted Greece in a similar attack on her. But even at this stage the Yugoslavs did not reply. The reasonable Yugoslav fear of not provoking the Italians caused an important chance of cooperation between the two Balkan countries to be lost and both to be unilaterally exposed as a result to the danger of subjugation by the Axis.(17)

4b) 1940-Before the French collapse

By the end of May 1940, when France, heavily committed to the western front against the Germans, ceased to participate to any extent in Allied planning for the Balkans; she was limited to pre-empting the Italian capture of Crete if Italy entered the war. Also the British Fleet had orders to patrol in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Britain understood her vital defence commitments to be the Middle East and the
Far East, and the need to cut down her obligations, meant that she could not afford to undertake, at least for the time being, an additional commitment such as the protection of Greece. (18) Of course one might ask why Britain then guaranteed the independence of Greece, if she was unable to fulfil her undertaking. The question must have two answers: first, because at the time of the guarantee, April 1939, the Second World War had not started yet, so that Britain could not actually known how heavily she would be engaged in it, let alone that the French would collapse. It must be bore in mind that the British guarantee was given in connection with the French one, and not alone. The second answer, which is also more vital, is that Britain hoped to strengthen the Greek response to the Italian provocations and hostilities against her. The aim was to ease Metaxas' fear about an imminent Italian attack on Greece following the conquest of Albania and to tie Greece to the Allies in case of war. In my opinion Britain did not actually believe at the time of the guarantee that she would have to actually implement it, least of all without active French backing.

The British Government tackled the question of a military alliance with Greece similarly when Metaxas reverted to his offer of 1938. In 1938, the British Government had declined Metaxas' offer on the grounds that Britain would have had to undertake costly and difficult fortifications on the Greco-Bulgarian frontier and that an alliance with Greece might have provoked and alarmed Italy. (19) In 1940 however, the advantages of such an alliance were significant. The British thought that if Britain were aligned with Greece, then in the event of Italy joining the war against the Allies, the Italians would have to divert forces, at least to guard against Greece and possibly to attack her forces, which would otherwise have been employed against the British.

An alliance would mean that British ships would be allowed to use Greek harbours and that British naval and air forces could be stationed in Crete and use it as a strategic base in
the Eastern Mediterranean. If Greece were left on her own, it was possible that under Italian and/or German pressure she could be brought to terms with the Axis rather than clash with it. Similarly an Anglo-Greek alliance could dissuade Bulgaria from assisting the Axis and encourage Turkey to implement her obligations towards the Allies according to the signed agreements. (20)

The disadvantages of a military alliance with Greece were many. First of all, it would mean a direct increase in British obligations to Greece at the time when Britain already had many other overseas commitments. Greece would necessarily require military equipment, which Britain was not able to supply due to its own defence problems. Italy, on learning of the alliance, might consider it an outright provocation, enter the war against the Allies, and possibly occupy Greek territory right away, before the Allies had any chance to assist Greece. It seemed that the disadvantages of a Greek alliance far outweighed the advantages. (21)

It seems that the Italian attitude vis-à-vis British foreign policy in the Balkans had deeply affected the British strategists and influenced their decisions once more. The whole of British foreign policy in the Balkans can almost be described in one phrase: not to have Italy as an adversary in the present war. (22)

4c) 1940 - The Significance of Crete

On 10th June 1940, Italy entered the Second World War against the Allies. France was on her knees after the successful German attack on her, so the British could not count any more on any cooperation from her. They need no longer be influenced by the Italian attitude since that had now been made clear. The British Government was in fact faced with an entirely new situation. Italy could attack British shipping in the Mediterranean very easily and the British fleet based in Alexandria, inferior to the Italians in
numbers, could not count on assistance from the French. Turkey would no longer have any thought of implementing her obligations to the Allies, and maintained her neutrality. Bulgaria was closer to the German camp; Yugoslavia was almost totally encircled by enemy states and flirting with the Axis herself, while Hungary and Rumania (after denouncing the British guarantee of April 1939) were regarded as definitely pro-Axis. Similarly, Russia was lurking threateningly over Bessarabia and the Northern Bukovina; and Greece was feeling uneasy at the presence of Italian troops on her borders. (23) See Maps 1,10,11

The British War Cabinet proposed that under the present unfavourable circumstances, Britain should try to induce Greece and Yugoslavia to intervene on the British side. Britain should also approach Turkey to join Greece and Yugoslavia and form a common Balkan bloc with British support and encouragement and, if possible, force the Balkan countries to declare war on the Axis. (24) The aim behind that urgent scheme was to force Germany to turn her attention to the Balkan peninsula and thus divert forces there, buying time for Britain while she was facing the prospect of being invaded by Germany. In other words, the British were returning to the French proposals of 1939, to their cost with a considerable delay.

However, it was extremely difficult to cause the Balkan nations to unite and enter the war, because they understood that such an action would be tantamount to suicide. The British, desperate at Balkan inaction, thought of provoking the Axis to attack the Balkans and thus draw them into the war. If Greece and Yugoslavia mobilised, that would possibly provide a pretext for Italy (and Germany) to invade the Balkans, violate their neutrality and force them to fight on Britain's side. (25)

The whole attempt at persuading the Balkans to ally with Britain foundered on the Balkan persistence in strict neutrality. The Balkan nations were against joining the war.
There was nothing that Britain could do to force them to fight for her unless some spectacular Allied victory was achieved in the west or the Axis committed a direct and unprovoked attack on them, which at the time was believed to be difficult, at least in Germany's case.

What was not ignored by the British was the strategic importance of some parts of Greece, particularly the islands of Melos, Salamis, Navarino, Argostoli and naturally Crete. They had always intended to interdict any Italian capture of Crete in the event of a war breaking out between Italy and the Allies and/or Greece. The Allied (French and British) Military Committee had indeed decided to proceed with the occupation of Crete the moment Italy attacked Greece. The British Government had instructed its commanders in the Middle East that "[i]n the event of the Italians attacking Greek territory, the forces arranged to proceed to Crete are to be despatched without further reference to London or Paris."(26) See Maps 10,11

The capture of Crete by the Allies was to be coordinated with simultaneous operations in the Dodecanese to cut the sea communications and supply convoys to the Italian bases there with sweeps of the Kasos Straits and Kithera islands. On 8th June 1940, Cunningham received an order from the First Sea Lord that "the occupation of Crete could only be carried out if Italy first attacked Greece."(27) (implying that previous orders to Cunningham were that Crete was to be occupied regardless of the Italians attacking Greece?)

Meanwhile, Metaxas was urging the Allies to supply Greece with all the necessary military equipment that was promised to Greece or had indeed been bought by Greece. In a letter to the Greek Ambassador in Paris, Metaxas wrote explicitly on 20th April 1940 "that if the Allies had given us the war material which we have repeatedly asked for and of which we are in desperate need, we would have been able to meet any hostile situation in the Balkans."(28) Similarly Papagos comments that the Governments of Britain and France not
only failed to provide Greece with the promised war equipment but had kept back that material for their own use, thus depriving the Greek army of necessary arms. (29) The lack of war supplies had contributed to the Greek army's inability to proceed any further towards Valona or Berat, so depriving the Greeks of their best chance to expel the Italians from Albania. (30)

4d) British Strategy and Military Aid to Greece October 1940-January 1941

As soon as the Greco-Italian war broke out, Britain had declared her support for Greece's struggle and had assured Metaxas that she would assist him as soon as possible and with all her effort. Metaxas himself had limited his immediate requests for military aid to naval protection of the Greek coasts and islands, and especially of Corfu, from Italian landings, and the protection of Athens from enemy air raids. As early as, on 28th October 1940, the British Prime Minister had in an Air Staff meeting proposed the move of four heavy bomber squadrons to the Middle East in order to aid Greece from advanced bases in that country. However, the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, had been against such a move on the grounds that it would risk the position of Britain in North Africa by weakening the almost non-existent R.A.F. there. (31)

The same day, the War Cabinet decided to prevent Italy from occupying Crete by using the British fleet in Alexandria to patrol the area. Meanwhile a battalion was to be despatched to Crete to reinforce the local Greek garrison and stiffen the morale of the inhabitants. The importance that was given to Crete over the rest of Greece can be highlighted by the following observation made by Churchill:

"We were about to despatch a battalion which had been earmarked for Malta to Crete. For the time being Malta
would have to go without their reinforcement. It seemed likely that the Italians intended to occupy Corfu. If they did, this would make very little difference to us strategically."

However, Wavell’s reaction to the possibility of sending military help to Greece was negative. He believed that his slender resources in North Africa were strained to the utmost limit. In order to stop any further draining of forces to Greece, he was forced to inform the Foreign Office Minister about his plan for an early offensive against the Italians (Operation Compass).

The British Minister in Athens was pressing his Government to assist Greece as soon as possible and to grasp the opportunity to establish British air bases in Northern Greece from which the British could bomb Northern Italy, the Italian bases in Albania, and the Ploesti oil-fields. To that appealing bait, the Foreign Office (F. O.) returned the usual answer about aiding only Crete, through which the whole of Greece would benefit. According to the F. O., the establishment of the British fleet in Crete would provide cover for the rest of the Greek islands in the Aegean and would deter the Italians from landing in the Ionian islands.

In the same way, the R.A.F. could undertake bombing missions in Albania in aid of the Greek army fighting against the Italians, as it actually happened. Finally the F.O. reminded Palairet that their forces were very weak and few in numbers:

“You should not encourage the Greeks to hope for more than we can achieve. Greeks should not be allowed to forget that our guarantee was given in conjunction with France, and that our position in the Middle East has been terribly injured by the French desertion, leaving us to face the whole attack of Italy through Libya.”

Eden was once more against the idea of supporting Greece beyond the ground force of one battalion already despatched.
to defend Crete. Eden’s opinion was that to cut down the forces in Middle East, in order that some could be sent in support of Greece, would be disastrous. The air force was weak and the army were preparing to engage Graziani’s forces in the western desert. To divide forces between Greece and Middle East, even if not equally, would still mean risking failure in both places. (35)

Eden was right in terms of strategy but politics dominated the Greek issue. Additional pressure on the British Government to support a friendly nation against the Italian Fascists came from the Headquarters of the British Military Mission in Athens.

On 9th November 1940, at a time when the front in Albania had been stabilised and the Italian advance slowed down, the British Military Mission in Athens received a very strict and cool telegram from the British War Office: “You are entirely wrong in supposing that wind is blowing in direction of possible despatch of British Military Force to Greek mainland and you are expressly forbidden by any word or suggestion of yours to imply that such a course is contemplated. To raise false hopes would be disastrous.” (36)

However, on 1st November 1940, the War Cabinet had been informed that a squadron of Blenheims had left Egypt for Athens, while two battalions in addition to the one already in Crete, were to be sent from Egypt as soon as General Wavell was able to despatch them, plus anti-aircraft and field guns. Churchill had managed to have his way. However, it was agreed in the War Cabinet that the risks were great, while in the long run it might be proved that Turkey was more important for Britain than Greece. (37)

Three days later, on 4th November, Churchill, told another Cabinet meeting that it was important to aid the Greeks to resist the Italian aggression. The Greek defences had been shown to hold and it was necessary to make the Greeks strong enough to tie down the Italians. For Britain, the loss of Athens would be as serious as the loss of Khartoum (note
Churchill's argument here in contrast to the one of 6th March 1941 which we shall see below), and a more irretrievable mistake, since the Italians would be able to strengthen their grasp in the Eastern Mediterranean by occupying the Greek islands and blockade any British assistance. For these reasons, three additional squadrons of aeroplanes (1 of Gladiators and 2 of Blenheims) were to be sent to Greece as soon as the Greek airfields could be prepared to accept them. Also, Wellington bombers were to operate from Malta over Albania in order to increase the scale of attacks on the Italians, while anti-aircraft guns were to be shipped to Greece to be installed on the Greek airfields to protect British aircraft from Italian air raids. (38) As the Cabinet Minutes noted,

"[o]ur public opinion was most anxious for British intervention in Greece. If Greece was overwhelmed, it would be said that in spite of our guarantee we had allowed one more small ally to be swallowed up. We could answer such criticisms by pointing out that the guarantee had been a joint Anglo-French guarantee, and that the plans for implementing it had been in the hands of General Weygand. But no answer would really help if another small ally was overwhelmed." (39)

The first R.A.F. squadrons in Greece, which reached Athens on 3rd November, were despatched by the bold action of the Air Chief Marshal in the Middle East, Sir Arthur Longmore, who on his own initiative and without asking for the permission of his superior Wavell or of the War Cabinet, decided to send to Greece No.30 Squadron of Mk.I Blenheims even if that meant crippling his own force in the Middle East. This course of action was greeted by a message of thanks from Churchill who telegraphed to him: "You have taken a very bold and wise decision." (40)

However, the initial British air assistance to Greece was very little indeed - only 15 planes - as Metaxas wrote in his
diary on 2nd November 1940; and he commented that the major British assistance should be her fleet. Metaxas’ diary has many entries where he complains about the inadequate British air and naval support. On 15th November Metaxas commented that British assistance in Greece came in drippings. (41)

On 17th November, Metaxas addressed to the British Government a note dealing with the continuation of the war. According to this note Metaxas believed that Britain was following a purely defensive war policy which was fruitless. He reckoned that Britain could pass into the offensive only if she could carry the war in the Balkans. That would enable her to protect and reinforce Greece more adequately, influence Yugoslavia and Turkey to join the Allies, and neutralise Bulgaria. In this way Britain could cover Eastern Macedonia and Egypt. Metaxas supported the idea that Britain had to transport significant forces from Egypt to Greece to assist the Greek war effort. He stressed the need for an immediate increase of the air force in Greece which he considered essential for the successful continuation of the war. Additionally he plead Britain for the support of the Greek army with anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, trucks and tanks. The aim was to throw the Italians out of Albania altogether. (42)

Along with the despatch of the first British air contingent to Greece, Air Vice Marshal S.H. D’Albiac arrived to arrange, coordinate and guide the R.A.F. missions. A sharp disagreement quickly emerged between the two Allies. Metaxas and General Papagos desired that the British planes should be used at the front against the Italians in a tactical role, rather than in the strategic one D’Albiac wished. D’Albiac thought that it would be much better to concentrate his efforts on the supply, transportation and communication systems of the enemy. He reckoned that he could do more damage by attacking the big harbours, the cities and the centres of the Italian army in Albania, than by using his
planes in close support of the Greek army. Anyway, that was the role of the Greek air force. D’Albiac hoped to be able to delay and possibly hamper enemy movements and to destroy a large amount of Italian logistical support that reached Albania. The Greeks reluctantly gave their consent. (43)

However, this was not going to be the last difference of opinion between the Allies over the role of the British air force. Shortly after the death of Metaxas on 29th January 1941, Papagos and the new Greek Premier Alexander Koryzis, suggested once more the use of the R.A.F. in a tactical role. D’Albiac outlined the disadvantages of such a tactic. However, the two Greeks pointed out that the Greek troops in Albania were badly shaken after the death of Metaxas and that continuous and intense Italian air activity hampered all Greek action. The change of the R.A.F’s role to active support of the Greek fighting troops for the forthcoming Valona attack would greatly encourage the Greek soldiers for the impending operations and would curtail the Italian air activity somewhat.

However, a more important point of conflict between the British and the Greeks occurred after the fall of Koritsa to the Greeks on 22nd November 1940. Metaxas said in his congratulatory speech on the radio that the “we [the Greeks] were fighting not just for our existence but for the other Balkan peoples and for the liberation of Albania”. (44)

This remark by Metaxas aroused uneasiness in London because the term ‘liberation’ could be interpreted in many different ways. Even before the capture of Koritsa by the Greeks, the British had expressed the view that Metaxas should make it explicit that the present Greco-Albanian border was acceptable to the Greeks. The British did not want to see any rectification of the present Greco-Albanian frontiers, which would have resulted in the annexation of Albanian territory by Greece. (45)

Needless to say, that remark by Metaxas increased the suspicions of the British, who requested Palairet to find out
the precise word Metaxas had used when referring to Albania. The word was liberation and not independence, as the British desired and as Simopoulos had told the F.O. (46) The British were not happy about it, but they could hardly pursue the matter because that might have further disturbed Anglo-Greek relations.

As the British thought, the Greeks always coveted Albania. The F.O. believed that the Greeks, after the war, might wish to annex part of Albania or, even worse, to conquer it by force of arms. The British were certain that the Greeks would require a rectification of the southern Albanian frontier, to incorporate the area opposite to Corfu and so limit the danger of it being near an enemy state, as it was at present. (47) However, I believe that this was the least of the reasons for which the Greeks would have wanted to annex Southern Albania. The British could not have been more naive about that. The were merely two reasons why the Greeks wanted to annex part of Albania. First, because Southern Albania or Northern Epirus as the Greeks called it, is occupied mainly by Greek speaking people who are also Greek Orthodox in religion. Second, Northern Epirus had been occupied by the Greek army during the First Balkan War and the First World War, but in both cases, the Greek army was forced to withdraw on the insistence of Italy which wanted to make Albania a protectorate of her.

The whole matter became more complicated when the British thought of preparing and supporting an Albanian uprising behind the Italian lines. The Special Operations Executive was working on it. Of course, it was difficult for the British to plan such a movement, without the Greeks being notified, since their assistance was virtually essential. The F.O. thought of asking Metaxas to make a declaration encouraging the Albanians to take up arms and fight the Italians. Such an action was desirable from the British point of view, not only because it would have assisted the Greek army's advance from the south, by harassing the Italian lines
to the north, and would have helped the general cause of the war against the Axis, but also because it could possibly block Greek aspirations to Albanian annexation.

However, the British believed that asking for such a declaration by Metaxas would probably arouse his suspicions of the British plan and possibly lead him to refuse to take part in it. According to that plan, King Zog would arrive in Athens, make a clarion call to the Albanians and possibly raise a force of fighters. In the end, the F.O. decided not to press Metaxas for a declaration, which might have resulted in friction between Greeks and British. (48)

A British plan to stage an Albanian revolution behind the Italian lines had started taking shape in British minds prior to the Italian attack on Greece in October 1940. In September 1940, the F.O. welcomed such a move to subversive action in Albania, provided it did not give the Italians the pretext to attack Greece and occupy Crete. A further British fear was that Italy and Germany might find out about the British plan and exert pressure and threaten Greece and Yugoslavia, countries from which the Albanian movement was to be assisted. The British very rightly thought that both Greece and Yugoslavia were too frightened of Germany and Italy to proceed with such a scheme if the Axis protested and threatened them. Thus for the time being, the plan was somewhat slowed down. (49)

In November, following Metaxas' remark, the tension in London increased, as the unpleasant possibility emerged of a partial Greek take-over of Albania. Reports from Belgrade indicated that when the Greek troops entered Koritsa, only Greek flags were raised and the lack of Albanian ones alarmed the British. The Greek Ambassador in Belgrade, told his British colleague that there was no question of Greek annexation of Albania, since Metaxas' statement did not provide for such a possibility. The Greek Ambassador continued however, by saying that in Southern Albania there were some villages whose inhabitants were mainly Greek and
that the Greek Government would wish to make "some arrangement" over them. (50)

The British plan for an Albanian movement, as it surfaced again, was to gather Albanian refugees and exiles living in Yugoslavia and at the right moment raise the revolution inside Albania. According to Robert Lee Wolff, the British had persuaded many leading Albanian personalities to help them, among them the Kryeziu brothers, Gani Bey and Said, Abas Kupi a Zogist, and an Albanian communist Mustafa Gjinishi. Abas Kupi had been an experienced guerrilla fighter who had fought against the Italians when they landed in Albania. He was very influential among his own people. It is believed that the revolt was to be mounted in the Kossovo region, once the British had supplied the Albanians with guns and a provisional government had been established there supported by the British. (51)

Robert Lee Wolff in his book The Balkans in our time says that the Greek General Staff did not approve of the British plan. First, it wanted the guns for the Greek army; and secondly, the Greeks aimed to annex part of Albania. If the Greeks accepted the assistance of an Albanian resistance, it would have been more difficult to claim any Albanian territory. Thus, Wolff says, the British plan was set aside. He goes on to claim that the initial Albanian enthusiasm and support for the plan, resulting from the Greek successes, was quickly lost, due to the chauvinism applied by the Greek army in the Albanian territories occupied. (52)

This argument is false. The Greeks were happy and anxious to see the Albanian assistance. According to F.O. files, Metaxas had arranged for the transportation of rifles and war material through Greece to Albania and Papagos had proposed that the Albanians should act in small groups of irregulars, operating mainly from Yugoslavia. Altogether, the Greeks welcomed such a British plan, which would have caused additional problems to the Italians in their rear. Thus, Wolff's argument about the so-called Greek
unwillingness to aid the plan and attempt to withhold the guns, is wrong. Koliopoulos, too, argues that though the Greeks might have wanted to incorporate part of Albania to Greece, they still favoured the British plan or at least they did not block it.(53)

Even though the British planned an Albanian revolt, they still aimed at blocking possible Greek demands for Albanian territory during or after the war. We must not forget that though the British plan had been temporarily slowed down in September 1940, after Metaxas’ remark in November it was hastily brought to the surface again. That shows a consistency. Greek territorial demands were after all widely known to the British even before the war, and they wished to preserve the existing balance of power between Greece and Albania.

That conclusion is also supported by the following point. It is difficult to estimate the actual help to the Greek army, had an Albanian revolt taken place. Undoubtedly, such a revolt would have caused some trouble to the Italians and would have made it more difficult for them to hold the solid defence line which they ultimately formed after the fall of Klisura to the Greeks in January 1941. It is very naive to claim that the Greek army, even with the assistance of the Albanian irregulars, would have managed to throw the Italians out of Albania altogether.

Going back to the presence of the R.A.F. in Greece, the divergence between Greeks and British on the role of the R.A.F., was not the end of the problems for the R.A.F and for Anglo-Greek cooperation, but simply the start. A very different obstacle facing the British pilots was the selection of the limited airfields from which the British airmen could fly their machines. Most of the Greek aerodromes in the north were close to the front, thus becoming easy targets for the enemy airforce. Apart from that, most of the northern airfields due to their geographical positioning were not all-weather airfields. Too often, in the middle of the autumn and
the approaching appalling winter weather, the aerodromes were covered in snow and mud, making them almost impossible to use.

Most of the northern runways were lacking proper modern drainage, so they were quite often covered in mud after a normal heavy rainfall, preventing the take-off and landing of the planes. The R.A.F. therefore had to limit itself to southern airfields only, so its operational capacity could never reach the maximum level. The southern bases were far better drained but being around Athens were too far from the front, forcing the pilots to fly long distances to and from their targets in very arduous climatic conditions. Additionally, the longer flying time forced the British pilots to cut down significantly their time over the front, in order to save fuel for the return to Athens. (54)

In considering the limitations on the R.A.F. in Greece, we must also note the insistence of Metaxas, whether reasonable or not, on denying the R.A.F. the use of northern airfields in Greece in any case, for the fear of provoking the Germans. The fear was that the Germans would consider such a British move as a direct threat to the Ploesti oil-fields. In order not to precipitate an attack on his country, Metaxas had expressly forbidden the R.A.F. squadrons to fly from the area around Salonika which though in the north, was generally flat and less rainy, and thus suitable for air operations. He did not even allow R.A.F personnel to reconnoitre the area. (55) When for a moment on 30th December, Metaxas very hesitatingly gave D’Albiac permission to proceed with the establishment of a bomber squadron in Salonika, the very next day his fear of the Germans reasserted itself and he changed his mind. (56)

Metaxas writes in his diary that day:

"I was frank with Palairet. Surely it [the Salonika base] is not to our benefit. We would provoke a German attack. If the
British have the air forces to oppose it and attack Germany, it is to our benefit. But if they do not - it will be a disaster for the Balkans that would imperil the British cause. I made it clear to Palairet that after the Italian defeat, we will help them against the Germans. I have made a long-lasting alliance with the British."(57)

Greek spirits were lifted somewhat, in the middle of November by an indirect British assistance to the common cause. On the night of 11th November 1940, Admiral Cunningham's naval aviation achieved a first class victory over the Italian battle fleet inside its base, at Taranto. Within minutes, three Italian battleships were hit and sunk, and two cruisers badly damaged.(58) The British did not stop there. The same night a British cruiser flotilla made a raid in the Straits of Otranto and attacked an enemy convoy moving towards Albania. Two of the enemy transport ships were sunk and the rest dispersed.(59)

However, strong criticism on the inaction of the British fleet in the Adriatic has been made by Papagos. He argues with considerable credit that the British air force, but mainly the British fleet did not undertake any serious attempts to attack Italian shipping between Italy and Albania. But neither the Italian ports of embarkation such as Brindisi and Bari, nor the Albanian ports of Durazzo and Valona were continuously bombed by the British air force. Similarly when the Greeks repeatedly asked for the strong British surface fleet to attack Italian convoys, the British denied by saying that Italian submarine activity, and the strong presence of the Italian air force excluded such a possibility. Cunningham suggested that Greek submarines could undertake such operations, assisted by British submarines. He also excluded the possibility about a joint Greek-British operation against the Italian naval base in the Dodecanese.

As Papagos claims, the inability of the British to hamper Italian convoys enabled the Italian army to strengthen its positions, to increase its numbers, to replenish and supply
the troops and subsequently to hold a solid defence line which cut short any Greek offensive attempts. It was left solemnly on the weak Greek surface fleet, and the 5 Greek submarines to cut Italian communications. The Greeks did not manage to achieve such a goal by themselves. As we saw in chapter 2 the Italians managed to ship to Albania considerable quantity of supplies.(60)

On 17th and 18th November Metaxas urged the British Government to send as soon as possible all the air assistance to Greece necessary to sustain the newly won Greek victories and provide the prerequisites for victories to come.(61) Also on the 17th Palaiiret telegraphed to London that the Greeks had made a request for 60 American fighters and that Metaxas hoped that Britain would waive its claim to them in view of the desperate crisis in Greece.(62)

On 24th November, Palaiiret made another urgent appeal to his government to assist the Greeks militarily and especially in the air. Once more he held out to his compatriots in London the old but unsuccessful bait of bombing the oil-fields in Ploesti. He proposed an immediate and strong air force presence in Northern Greece with the aim of attacking the Ploesti oil-fields, threatening Bulgaria and backing up popular anti-Axis feeling in Yugoslavia. Palaiiret commented that Metaxas was in favour of such an action, though the Greek Premier changed his mind a little later in order to stop any possible German southward drive.(63) Again the telegram did not do the trick.

The British had already sent too much, more than they could afford. On 16th November 1940, they had decided, in view of the Greek success against the Italians, to ship to Greece quite a large package of military aid in an attempt not only to provide immediate defence for the Greeks, should the Italians manage to stage a strong counter-attack, but also to develop Greece as a base for future operations against Italy. The code name for that operation was "Barbarity", and it involved among other things, 2 medium bomber squadrons,
3 fighter squadrons, 1 battery of 8 heavy anti-aircraft guns, 1 battery of 12 light anti-aircraft guns and around 5,000 men. (64)

At the same time, a further increase in air power took place in Greece with the arrival of No.84 and No.211 Bomber Squadrons equipped with Mk.I Blenheims and of No.80 Fighter Squadron equipped with Gladiators. With that additional strength, one should count No.70 Squadron of Wellington bombers which operated from Egypt during suitable nights and refuelled in Athens. (65)

Seeing British inability (or unwillingness?) to assist them with a larger number of aeroplanes the Greeks decided to approach the United States of America and pleaded for military aid in the form of aircraft. In November 1940, Greece had asked the United States to assist them with aircraft to supply their lack of modern fighters. The United States of America (U.S.A.) replied favourably at first and promised Greece the despatch of 60 planes. Greece asked Britain to support the Greek case. However, the American assurances were not honoured.

Instead of the 60 planes, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt agreed, after a personal appeal from Metaxas, to send Greece just 30 Curtis P40 Tomahawk planes. The intervention of Britain in December 1940, though requested by Metaxas, led to the 30 desperately needed aeroplanes being delivered not to Greece but to Britain who kept them for herself. The American authorities explained to Greece that the entire American production of these machines was being delivered to Britain. (66) Greece had asked Britain to waive its claim on those planes, as we have already seen, but it did not, pleading their emergency needs in the Middle East and the British Isles.

Later on, at the end of December 1940, after a new Greek appeal, the United States with the approval of Britain, promised 30 P36 Mohawks which were being delivered to Britain at the time. Unfortunately, only some of these planes
were in the Middle East and ready to be shipped to Greece. The 30 P36s promised to Britain were to be replaced by an equal number of P40s from the U.S.A. When it came to transporting their P40s to Britain, the British insisted on their being shipped on American vessels. The Americans rejected that, as violating their neutrality law. Since the P40s were not shipped to Britain, Britain decided to keep the 30 P36s allocated to Greece.

Even when the Greeks proposed to ship Britain's P40s to Britain on Greek ships in order to hasten the already delayed despatch of the Greek P36s, Britain still insisted on withholding the latter on the grounds of an impending German air assault on Britain. (67) After that incident, Greece tried again and obtained a new promise by Washington of 30 G36 Grumman fighter planes. In February 1941, Britain intervened once again to block this delivery to Greece as well and kept the planes for herself. After repeated and strenuous demands to both the American and British Governments by the Greek Government in March 1941, the British decided to release the fighters to Greece.

However, the British had considerable difficulties in shipping the planes from America to West Africa and from there to Egypt, and by the time the planes arrived in Egypt, Greece had been occupied by the Axis and it was too late. Even then, the British kept the 30 G36s for themselves and in return allowed the exiled Greek airforce in Egypt to use some of their Hurricanes. (68) Even if the latter were better than the American machines, by that time the urgency did not exist since Greece was no longer fighting Italy in Albania.

In November 1940 Metaxas had assured the British Minister in Athens that under no circumstances was he going to seek mediation by Germany and that he would fight the Axis to the end. (69) However, he informed Palairet that if Britain wished to provoke an attack on Greece by the Germans, they had better supply Greece first with adequate
armaments to withstand it. Since the British were not even able to supply Greece against the Italians, what would happen if the Germans were to join in the conflict? Metaxas told the British Government that he felt sure there would be a German attack on his country sooner or later, but that if the British Government wished to precipitate it, it had better tell him so explicitly, in view of the consequences and of the mutual responsibilities which the British and Greeks had assumed. (70)

However, as Palairet told London on 17th December 1940, the ability of the Greeks to confront the Axis depended on Britain's capability to supply them with all the necessary means. (71). It is possible that Palairet intended to frighten his government with the idea that the Greeks would not fight the Germans if not properly equipped. In this way he hoped to force the British statesmen in London to assist the Greeks more vigorously, thus achieving his purpose of making the British increase their aid to the Greeks substantially. A month before his death, Metaxas told Palairet that the Balkans should unite against Germany - which would attack Greece anyway - after Italy's defeat.

In November 1940, following the entry of large German forces into Rumania since October, the British War Cabinet decided to review the possible reactions of Yugoslavia, Turkey and Bulgaria to a German intervention in the Greco-Italian war. In a memorandum of 21st November 1940, the British investigated the possible response of Yugoslavia to a German attack on Greece. Though the British were assured on numerous occasions by the Yugoslav Government that it would not allow the passage of German troops through her territory, and would resist any German attack on Yugoslav territory, and would fight even if Bulgaria attacked Greece alone, the Yugoslavs were very reluctant to make that promise in relation to a combined German and Bulgarian attack on Greece. The reasons for that must be the excellent German propaganda which had isolated Yugoslavia and
German promises of territorial concessions to her if she collaborated with the Axis.

Bulgaria, on the other hand, had been neutral since the beginning of the Greco-Italian conflict and had informed both Athens and Ankara that it would maintain its neutrality and would not carry out any hostile act against either Greece or Turkey. When the Greek Minister in Sofia asked the Bulgarian Government about their reactions if attacked by any party (possibly implying Germany), the Bulgarians did not give a clear answer. As far as Turkey was concerned, the Turkish Prime Minister declared that he would help Greece militarily and declare war on whichever of Bulgaria or Germany or both invaded Greece. As we shall see below all these Balkan assurances came to nothing when the time came to honour them.

One day later, on 22nd November, Churchill sent the following telegram to General Wavell:

"...If, as seems probable, Germany immediately attacks Greece through Bulgaria with or without Bulgarian aid, we shall certainly be bound to urge Turkey to the utmost to enter the war. Turkey will either refuse, in which case Greece will soon be ruined; or Turkey will come in, in which case she will make most heavy demands for arms, troops, ships and Air. Importance of getting Turkey in and perhaps Yugoslavia would far outweigh any Libyan operation, and you would be relegated to the very minimum defensive role in Egypt".

It is evident therefore, that Churchill had made up his mind quite early about a Greek campaign but this in the context of Turkish assistance. All he had to do now was to persuade his colleagues about it. Wavell and his colleagues in Middle East had other views. First of all, the campaign in North Africa was still going on and Wavell was ready to launch Operation Compass to sweep Graziani's army from Libya. There were many uncertainties operating as factors against aiding the Greeks. It was not known whether the
Greek army, after all these months of bitter and unequal fighting in the snowy mountain peaks of Albania, would be capable of fighting the new adversary. The British rightly thought that the Greeks must have suffered tremendous losses in men and material, and it would not be easy to replace either.

The British had very little to spare for a Greek campaign. Additionally the ambiguous and non-committal attitudes of Turkey and Yugoslavia, not to mention Bulgaria, added considerably to the risks. No one knew how Turkey and Yugoslavia would act if British troops landed in Greece to support her against the Germans. No one knew whether Bulgaria would throw in her lot with the Axis or stay neutral. Most of all, the Germans were mounting a formidable force in Rumania against which the Anglo-Greek contingent had nothing comparable. The stakes were high and there was much more to lose than to gain. If the British decided for a Greek operation, they might have to halt all operations in North Africa, muster all their forces in the Middle East and throw them into the unknown expedition in Greece with all the odds against them. (74) However, it seemed that there was some slight chance of success if a Balkan bloc was established in time to check the Germans. Churchill planned his next move with that in mind.

On 27th November, the possibility of German support for the Italian attack on Greece was discussed in London. Different scenarios of the German preparations in the Balkans were reviewed in connection with an assault on Greece. The attitudes of Yugoslavia, Turkey and Bulgaria were re-examined again. It was estimated that Yugoslavia would resist if attacked, and Turkey would intervene if Germany sought to use the communications of Eastern Bulgaria (a case of British wishful thinking). Bulgaria under pressure would probably give way to German demands. However, the British believed that Germany would most likely march through Bulgaria, since to attack Yugoslavia in order to move through
her territory, the Germans would require significant forces which they were not believed to possess at this moment. (75)

An attack on Yugoslavia would also require Italian help from Albania. But Italian forces were lacking in morale. Even if Germany decided to attack Greece through Bulgaria, she would still need to safeguard herself from any Turkish intervention. That would demand a minimum of 8 divisions which with the shortage of railway capacity could not possibly be maintained in winter conditions. (76)

It was suggested therefore, that such a large move could probably not take place before spring, when the ground in the Balkans would be dry, suitable for mechanised and armoured formations and when the climatic conditions would allow extensive use of the air force. It was concluded that Germany would try to neutralise Turkey by persuading Bulgaria to allow full use of the Bulgarian communications and thus exert military and diplomatic pressure on both these countries, without instigating unnecessary Balkan confrontations. In the meantime, Germany would improve communications and set up bases and stockpiles in Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, for the invasion of Greece. (77)

It was impossible for the British to estimate how long it would take Germany to regulate the Balkans according to her wishes. The British were right in their assessment of the ways by which Germany would attempt to manipulate the Balkan nations to act in accordance with her own plans. But their inability to calculate the time Germany needed to attain this goal proved to be decisive. It took Germany very little time indeed.

On 7th January 1941, Churchill sent a message to Wavell in the Middle East criticizing his inactivity, though his offensive against the Italians had started already. Churchill urged Wavell to have "less fat and more muscle and a smaller tail and larger teeth." Churchill complained to him, that he had around 350,000 men of whom only a very small proportion
was actually engaged in fighting, while the rest comprised the logistical support. (78) The next day, the Chiefs of Staff in London discussed the situation in Libya, Middle East, Greece and the Balkans, and under the constant pressure of Churchill, who favoured a Greek enterprise, decided to authorize the despatch of British forces to Greece against the Germans. It was assumed that the German attack would not materialise before the end of the month. Here the British had over-estimated the German ability to launch an attack on Greece.

Wavell and Air Chief Marshal Longmore were asked to cut down their commitment to the Western Desert offensive and prepare for an operation in Greece. Accordingly, Longmore was ordered to send three squadrons of Hurricanes and one or two of Blenheims to Greece at once, even though that left his force far below the minimum necessary for the protection of North Africa. Wavell argued, that the advance into Cyrenaica must at all costs be allowed to be completed. By hurting Italian morale, it would benefit the Greeks more than the actual despatch of British troops and transport to Greece, which would inevitably slow down the pace of the British advance in Cyrenaica. (79)

On 10th January 1941, Wavell sent a despatch to London indicating his belief that the German troop concentration in Rumania was nothing more than a war of nerves, aimed at raising Italian morale, and upsetting the Greeks, but above all, inducing the British to divide their forces between Greece and Libya and thus to cut short their advance in the latter. Wavell commented that a German advance in the Balkans could not be halted anyway, even if the British acted immediately, and it was far better to proceed with finishing off the Italians in North Africa, than make a dangerous division of British power between two separate fronts, which would be exactly what the Germans wanted the British to do. (80)
In less than an hour, a reply was sent to Wavell's "revolutionary" complaint.

"Our information contradicts idea that German concentration in Rumania is merely 'moves in war of nerves' or 'bluff' to cause dispersion of force."... One, perhaps two armoured divisions with probably two mountain divisions, over a hundred dive-bombers supported by fighters and some parachute troops seem to be all that could cross Bulgarian-Greek frontier up till the middle of February.

But this force, if not stopped may play exactly the same part in Greece as German army's break through on the Meuse played in France. All Greek divisions in Albania will be fatally affected. These are the facts and implications which arise from our information, in which we have good reasons to believe. "...Destruction of Greece will eclipse victories you have gained in Libya, and may affect decisively Turkish attitude, especially if we have shown ourselves callous of fate of allies. You must now therefore conform your plans to larger interests at stake.

Nothing must hamper capture of Tobruk, but thereafter all operations in Libya are subordinate to aiding Greece and all preparations must be made from the receipt of this telegram for the immediate succour of Greece up to the limit prescribed.....

We expect and require prompt and active compliance with our decisions, for which we bear full responsibility."(81)

The last paragraph must have left Wavell in no doubt that Churchill demanded a Greek front right now, and he would stop at almost nothing to have it. The directive by the Chiefs of Staff to the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East, was that the British Government had decided that it was essential to afford maximum assistance to the Greeks with the object of resisting a German attack on her. The extent and the effectiveness of the aid to the Greeks were going to have a determining influence on the attitudes of Turkey and Russia.
and would certainly influence the U.S.A. The assistance to Greece had priority over all the other operations in the Middle East, once Tobruk was in British hands, though the drive to Benghazi, if attainable, should be continued. The initial units to be despatched to Greece were to reach the maximum level of: 1 squadron of infantry tanks, 1 regiment of cruiser tanks, 10 regiments of artillery including anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns and 5 squadrons of air support, 3 of Hurricanes and 2 of Mk.IV Blenheims. (82)

4e) Anglo-Greek Military Conferences January 1941 and British Decision to Aid Greece February 1941.

Wavell was instructed, in view of his forthcoming commitments in Greece, to fly to Athens and consult with the Greek military and political authorities in order to learn their views and concert defence plans. That is what he did. His trip to Athens was kept strictly secret and no announcements were made. However, it is possible that the German legation in Athens did have an indication of his trip. Wavell arrived in Athens on 13th January and the same evening had a meeting with Metaxas about the present military situation in the Balkans and in Greece. Over the following two days, Wavell together with Longmore had a series of discussions with Metaxas, Palairet and Papagos. In those meetings the British sought to learn the Greeks’ point of view regarding the German menace arising in the short term and their plans for defending Greece. The Greeks were eager to know the British potential for despatch of British troops to Greece. These conferences were orientation meetings for each side, to understand where the other stood.

At the outset, General Papagos gave a full account of the military aspects of the Greco-Italian war so far, and he stressed to the British the Greek army serious lack of transport (both vehicles and pack animals), winter clothing, aeroplanes, anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns without which it
was impossible to finish off the Italians in Albania. How could the Greek army concentrate against the Germans when these essential elements were so short? Wavell replied that he had already sent to Greece 350,000 pairs of socks, 200,000 items of bed linen, 180,000 pairs of boots and a great quantity of woollen clothing and blankets. He was willing to send more, when available. The boots that Wavell had sent to Greece were very welcome but unfortunately due to the fact that they were desert shoes, they were very light for winter conditions and became soaked very easily in the snow and rain of the Albanian mountains. However, no blame attached to Wavell for that, because he did not have any other type of boots at his disposal.

In terms of transport, Wavell was willing to despatch a transport ship with 200 vehicles captured from the Italians in the desert, but the voyage would take at least a week. Wavell offered to send another ship with approximately 200-300 Italian lorries from Alexandria as soon as he could do so. Unfortunately he had no pack animals at all. 300 trucks arrived in Greece at the middle of January, but by the time they were despatched to the front the Greek High Command had already postponed any further offensive, due to the prevailing weather conditions and the need for replenishing the Greeks. Most of the trucks had already seen too much action in the desert with the Italians. Once they reached Albania, they frequently broke down due to mechanical trouble.

In terms of air power, Longmore said that he could not send any more than Nos. 112, 11, and 33 Squadrons which were already earmarked for Greece, because the existing aerodromes were over-crowded already and appalling weather conditions were restricting the operations of even the aeroplanes already in Greece.

Longmore asked Metaxas to allow British air forces to operate in Salonika; but, as he had done in the past, Metaxas
rejected that proposal on the grounds of not provoking the Germans in Rumania. Lastly, Metaxas promised Longmore the creation of new aerodromes that could accommodate a total of 14 squadrons. What was agreed between Longmore and Papagos was that the R.A.F in the Middle East should start to operate against Italian shipping in the Dodecanese and protect convoys from Egypt to Greece and back.

But the most important discussion was the one arising from the imminent danger of a German invasion of Greece. Papagos informed Wavell, that according to his estimation so far, 8 or 9 British divisions were needed to defend Salonika and Eastern Macedonia. Wavell could offer only much, much less. The Greeks felt their first major disappointment at being abandoned. Wavell, at this point could only send one combined anti-tank and anti-aircraft regiment, the 102 Royal Horse Artillery (R.H.A.), a company of light tanks (cruisers) which could be employed in the Albanian theatre of war, two regiments of field artillery and one or two of medium artillery.

Metaxas very politely rejected the proposed force. The reason for doing so was basically that while this force was woefully inadequate to meet the German attack and provide any real assistance to the Greeks, yet it would be more than enough to provide the Axis with a well grounded pretext to attack Greece sooner and thus frustrate all Anglo-Greek planning.

Wavell, on the other hand, believed that the presence of even those few British forces in Greece would greatly boost the Greek morale, provide the Turks and the Yugoslavs with a good cause to join the Allies and discourage the Germans from undertaking any advance against Greece. Wavell thought that, if the British did nothing to aid the Greeks at this perilous moment, it would been seen as Britain abandoning the Greeks to their fate and thus discourage Yugoslavia and Turkey from taking part in the battle.
Turkish and Yugoslav help was imperative and urgently needed, in order to sustain the Greek cause. (87)

Metaxas had a totally different view. He believed that the premature and insufficient despatch of British forces to Greece would do more harm than good. Not only would the Germans be inclined to attack Greece sooner, but also the Yugoslavs and the Turks would see British inability to support Greece militarily and thus be discouraged from taking the part of the Allies. Metaxas proposed that no British troops should be sent now. However, all the preparations for their landing in Greece should commence in Egypt. He went on to inform Wavell that the Greek army would proceed speedily with preparation of all the necessary facilities for the British troops. Material and stores would be gathered by the Greeks and kept under constant surveillance until the time when they would have to be used. Metaxas informed Wavell that the Yugoslav Ambassador had declared to the Greek Government that the Yugoslavs would resist a German attack on them, but that, if a British landing in Salonika precipitated such an attack, Yugoslavia would revoke its decision to fight the Germans. (88)

Last but not least, Metaxas suggested to Wavell that the British should spread rumours of a large-scale offensive in Tripolitania in order to mislead the Axis, while secretly organising forces and shipping for the landing in Greece. In case Wavell and the British Government should misunderstand his intentions in declining their assistance, Metaxas explained to Wavell that the British should not interpret his rejection of the British military offer to Salonika as an outright refusal, but merely as a timely postponement. Once the situation in Albania had substantially improved, more Greek forces would be made available to man Eastern Macedonia along with the British. (89)

Metaxas assured all the British representatives that he would never negotiate with Germany for a separate peace
and that he would prefer his country's destruction than to dishonour his alliance with Britain. He said that the Greeks fought only for honour. Palaiiret and Wavell were obviously moved by Metaxas' words and congratulated him. On the same day, he commented in his diary: "It would be funny to be called a Germanophile in London again after all that."(90)

It seems however, that Wavell, did not understand or believe the Greeks, since in his despatch to London on 15th January 1941, he wrote ".....Refusal of Greeks to accept units offered for Albania front may be due to false pride or other political reason."(91) This lends weight to the view of Papagos that the British military offer though inadequate should be accepted, for political reasons only, since the British might otherwise think that the Greeks were insincere in their determination to fight the Germans and thus be shaken in their confidence in the Greeks.(92)

So each of the Allies came out of their first conferences with unanswered questions as to what the other had thought. Each felt that the other was hiding something. Going back to the actual facts, Papagos had a few days earlier handed Metaxas a report on the possibility of a German invasion of Greece from Bulgaria. He estimated that at least nine divisions, including the three Greece already had stationed in the Metaxas Line, must be used for the defence of Salonika. The Albanian theatre of war could not support any operations in Eastern Macedonia, while the defence of Salonika must be made on the fortified line. If this line was outflanked from the west, additional troops should be made available for the protection of the city. If Yugoslavia joined the Greeks, the Italians could be expelled from Albania, while powerful Yugoslav forces could guard the west of the Metaxas Line, so that it could not be outflanked.

The British should land in Salonika, Kavalla and other ports in Macedonia, thus minimizing the time required for disembarkation, which was estimated to take fifteen days.
Large numbers of anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns must be brought by the British, since the Greek army was short of both. If Salonika were threatened by the enemy, the right flank of the army in Albania would be in mortal danger. In that case, it would have to extricate itself from Albania in good time, so as not to be cut off from the rest of the country by the advancing enemy formations. (93)

On 18th January, Metaxas summoned Palairet and handed him a statement on the British offer of military assistance to Greece. In this official communication, Metaxas stressed once more the Greek’s unbroken determination to fight the Germans at all costs but he was reluctant to provoke them, unless Britain could offer Greece substantial military aid. Metaxas explained that the British military help proposed (24 guns, 12 heavy guns, around 40 anti-aircraft guns, 24 anti-tank guns and 65 middle and light tanks) was far too low in comparison with what the Germans had in Rumania to oppose them. Most of all, the British offer did not include infantry at all.

The Greek Premier reiterated that the Yugoslav Government had assured Greece that it would resist any German attack on Greek territory except if such an attack was provoked by British landings in Salonika. Finally, Metaxas informed the British Government that the despatch of the British troops to Greece should not take place before the Germans had crossed the River Danube or the Dobrudja frontier and entered Bulgaria. Metaxas drew Palairet’s attention to the fact that the present British forces in the Middle East could not do much to restore the strategic problem of South-Eastern Europe, but the Greeks were ready to do their duty to the end and it was for the British Government to take account of these Greek concerns, those of “loyal and devoted friends.” (94)

Though the British were disappointed by the flat Greek refusal, they understood that they could not press the Greeks against their own judgement. However, the Greek proposal,
that the British troops should be only sent after the Germans had crossed the Rumano-Bulgarian borders, rendered the British hopes of success very slim, since by then it might be too late to reverse the situation. The British must have hoped to be able to transport large number of troops and material to Greece, have time to fortify their positions and discuss alternative defensive plans. Most of all, they had hoped that by the speedy transportation of troops to Greece, they would influence Yugoslavia and/or Turkey to join them.

If the British forces were taken to Greece after the German crossing of the Rumano-Bulgarian borders, the interval before the German attack on Greece would probably not be sufficient to attain the above mentioned goals. Anyway more troubles were on their way to the Mediterranean. The active appearance in Sicily of Fliegerkorps X meant a heavy extra burden for the R.A.F in the Middle East.

On 18th January Wavell despatched another of his telegrams to London restating his views to his superiors. He informed the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that the defence of Salonika was a very dangerous half-measure and that he did not believe the British forces engaged would be sufficient to protect the city and halt the German advance. Once more, he went back to his aspiration to advance until the final defeat of the Italians in Libya, without giving them any time to re-group and reinforce. He reminded London of the naval and air advantages of the capture of Benghazi. (95) Possibly he was hoping to make them forget all about the Greek episode.

On 21st January, after the Greek rejection of aid, the Chiefs of Staff decided to give Wavell the green light to proceed with his advance in Libya, while they ordered the capture of the Dodecanese in order to exclude the possibility of Fliegerkops X operating from there against British shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Chiefs of Staff agreed to send two more squadrons to Greece, the No.11 with Blenheims and No.112 with Gladiators and Hurricanes. (96)
However, the death of Metaxas 29th January due to an internal haemorrhage produced an entirely new situation for both the Greeks and the British.

The new Premier Koryzis was, as was said above, a sincere and honourable man, but he seemed to lack the psychological strength and spiritual determination of a strong figure such as his predecessor and that was to be manifested quite soon. While on 4th February 1941, Papagos stressed to the British Military Mission in Athens the immediate replenishment of Greek artillery munitions which would be literally exhausted within two months (97), Koryzis on the 8th made a new declaration to the British Government via its Minister in Athens.

Koryzis based his new communication to London on the one made earlier by Metaxas. He reaffirmed to Palairet the Greek determination to fight the Germans; and he emphasized caution in not shipping the British troops to Greece prematurely, which would act as a provocation for the Germans; and he proposed the encouragement of Turkey and Yugoslavia in order to join the battle against the common enemy. (98) However, Koryzis committed a blunder. He left open the matter of the composition and size of the British forces in Greece, thus providing the British with the excuse to send whatever they thought expedient for her defence (while Metaxas had stressed the need for no less than 8-9 British divisions and had specified the despatch of infantry). More importantly, Koryzis welcomed the despatch of British forces to Greece, even before the Germans crossed the Rumano-Bulgarian borders.

At the time when Koryzis decided to invite the British to Greece, the forces of Wavell had performed a small miracle. Three weeks ahead of time, Benghazi had fallen into British hands on 6th February. But Wavell had made a mistake as well. In his attempt to dissuade London from sending British forces to Greece, he had over-stressed the importance of keeping up the advance in Libya. He had managed
temporarily to postpone the Greek headache, when by sheer luck the Greeks had refused the British weak force. But, by concentrating so vigorously on the North African operations, he had fallen into his own trap. He had captured Benghazi three weeks before the estimated time; and he had thereby freed British forces for a campaign in Greece. Now he had no excuse not to agree to a Greek campaign. And he would have to pay for that mistake very dearly.

It was an unexpected coincidence of events: the Greeks asking for help from the British, rather than rejecting it as before, when the British were now able to provide it. Churchill grasped the opportunity to push the Greek option again. During a War Cabinet meeting, on 11th February, when told that the British forces in the Middle East were fully employed and would not become available for Greece, Churchill burst out: "What you need out there [Middle East] is a Court Martial and a firing squad. Wavell has 300,000 men, etc, etc."(99)

The next day, Churchill despatched a telegram to Wavell which ended with the following paragraphs:

"Our first thoughts must be for our ally, Greece, who is actually fighting so well. If Greece is trampled down or forced to make a separate peace with Italy, yielding also air and naval strategic points against us to Germany, effect on Turkey will be very bad. But if Greece, with British aid can hold up for some months German advance, chances of Turkish intervention will be favoured. Therefore it would seem that we should try to get in a position to offer the Greeks the transfer to Greece of the fighting portion of the Army which has hitherto defended Egypt, and make every plan for sending it and reinforcing it to the limit with men and material.

.........In the event of its proving impossible to reach any good agreement with the Greeks and work out a practical military plan, then we must try to save as much from the wreck as possible. We must at all costs keep Crete and take any Greek islands which are of use as air bases."(100)
Churchill, of course, did not specify in his telegram to Wavell whether the holding of the important Greek islands, would take place with Greek consent or without it. On 13th February, Papagos informed Lieutenant-General T.G.G. Heywood, the Head of the British Military Mission in Athens, that according to his information the Germans had concentrated in Rumania twelve divisions, ten of infantry, three of them mountain and five motorized and two armoured. This force was supported by 400 aeroplanes. The Greek Staff calculated that with the use of both rail and road communications, they could be at the Greek frontier in 12 days after crossing the Danube. The Greeks had 10,000 frontier troops and three divisions (27 battalions) to meet them. Papagos expected the main German thrust along the Greek left, in the Rupel-Nevrokopi area. Papagos proposed several choices for a possible line of defence: first of all, the strongly fortified Metaxas Line (also called the Mount Beles-River Nestos line) which needed to be manned by at least 80 first line battalions unavailable at the time; secondly, there was the Struma line but it could be turned either through Mount Beles or the Axios river valley, south of the River Struma. In either case, the Germans could reach Salonika within 5-6 days.

Finally there was the Aliakmon line. This ran from the source of the River Aliakmon to Mount Vermion and Mount Kaimaktsalan to Mount Olympus. This defence line was the most suitable since it was naturally strong, surrounded by three mountains and could be manned by fewer troops than the other two. Also, by being away from the borders, it allowed more time for the Allies to fortify it. However this line could be outflanked too, if the enemy moved through Yugoslav territory or, even worse, if Yugoslavia joined the Germans in the attack against Greece. Known as the Aliakmon or Vermion line, it could be turned if the Germans advanced through Monastir to the Florina plain; and this would
threaten not only the Aliakmon line but also the rear of the Greek forces in Albania.

If Yugoslavia joined the Axis or simply allowed the Germans through her territory, a more southerly line would have to be selected. That would be a line from Olympus via the Aliakmon, River Venetikos, Mount Oriakas, Mount Vassilitsa, Mount Smolikas, and Merdjan to the Greco-Albanian frontier and known as the Venetikos line. This was also a naturally strong line, with Lake Vouthroton to the right and the Greek army in Albania on the left, which would be forced to synchronize its defence by a well-timed withdrawal to that line, if possible. (102)

However, that was the nub of the whole question of choosing the correct defence position. The decisive factor on which the whole Greek and to a large extent Allied strategy in Greece depended, was Yugoslavia. In the present circumstances, the right course would be to choose the Aliakmon line or the Venetikos line, but both these defensive positions entailed a great cost. The cost was the abandonment of Eastern Macedonia, Western Thrace and Salonika to the enemy; areas for which the irredentistic claims of mainly Bulgaria and of Yugoslavia were well known to the Greeks. That would result in masses of refugees moving from these areas to the south, feeling insecure and abandoned. Worst of all, choosing a southerly defence line prejudged Yugoslavia's attitude, which had not been clarified yet.

Papagos explained that to Heywood in February. He proposed that for reasons of internal policy, battle should be given on the fortified line, while the Aliakmon line was prepared simultaneously in case a speedy withdrawal had to be made. Papagos reckoned that the Germans would need approximately 25-30 days to reach the Aliakmon line, thus enabling him to prepare a second defence line there, provided always that the army in Albania could also withdraw without disintegrating into confusion. (103) It is
evident that the Greek strategy was tied to the Yugoslav attitude but that the British would find it very difficult to understand that. The mistake was that an Allied strategy was left to be determined by an imponderable factor: Yugoslavia. Alternative Allied strategies should have been developed, prior to the German attack, which did not wait on clarification of Yugoslavia's attitude. It was unbelievably naive for the fortune of a nation, of an alliance and of thousands of men, was to be weighed up, guided and planned on the basis of uncertainty as to Yugoslav intentions. The burden of that mistake lies on both the Allies.

In London, the Cabinet Defence Committee decided to assist the Greeks. The availability of the forces in Middle East at the right time played a significant role in shaping the British decisions. The successful Greek campaign against the Italians influenced London as well. It was difficult to say 'No' to a successful ally that was tying down considerable Italian forces, which could otherwise be sent to North Africa to face the British. The British were afraid that a successful German and/or Italian occupation of Greece would not only provide the enemy with the air and naval bases to inflict damage on the British possessions in the Eastern Mediterranean, but would also seal the fate of both Turkey and Yugoslavia which were still neutral (further evidence of the Yugoslav preoccupation). It was decided therefore that bold action was called for right now, while there was still time to upset German plans in the Balkans. The risks were considerable but had to be taken for political and strategic reasons and for the moral reasons that the British had promised that they would assist Greece if her independence was threatened. (104)

Following that course, Eden and General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, were despatched to the Middle East and then to Athens to concert the common policy. The British were hoping by their willingness to support the Greeks, to induce Yugoslavia and/or Turkey to declare war.
on Germany and thus contribute militarily to the forthcoming battle against the Germans. In that way Greece would have more chance of being saved from devastation. However, things turned out quite differently from British wishful thinking.

On 17th February 1941, Turkey and Bulgaria issued a common declaration reaffirming their friendship and joint efforts to preserve the peace in the Balkans. That meant one thing: that Turkey would not fight Bulgaria even if the latter allowed the Germans on her territory. Turkey was lost to the Allied cause. Actually she was lost before 17th February 1941, when in the middle of December 1940 she had made an agreement with Germany, under which the latter would respect Turkish territory and welcome a re-distribution of the spoils in the Balkans in which Turkey would play a significant role, while in return Turkey would abstain from any anti-German warlike moves in the Balkans and would not participate in British operations in Greece. (105)

That was the result of the brilliant diplomacy of Papen, the German Ambassador in Ankara. On the one hand, Turkey rejected a British proposal for military assistance of 10 air squadrons and 100 anti-aircraft guns, on the grounds that this was too little to make a difference and that its acceptance would risk Turkish neutrality in the Balkans vis-à-vis Germany. (106) On the other hand Turkey, in return for joining the Allies demanded territorial concessions in the Dodecanese, Bulgarian Thrace, Albania and even Salonika. These unreasonable demands were supported by the British Ambassador in Ankara, Knatchbull-Hugessen but not by the Foreign Office who thought that Salonika was too much for Turkey. (107) Turkey demanded to be bribed to 'fight' the Germans, while behind the Allied back it agreed terms with the Germans.

4e1) Military Interlude
On 25th February, a British commando unit landed on the island of Castellorizo in the Dodecanese - just off the Turkish coast, east of Rhodes - with the aim of capturing it from the Italians. Unfortunately, the Italians put up a brave resistance and radioed for help. The Italian navy from Rhodes came on the scene, landed 240 soldiers and sailors, and shelled the British positions. On 27th February, the 500 British commandos were surrounded and forced to surrender. It seems that the operation on Castellorizo was undertaken in the context of the general plan for the Dodecanese, codenamed Operation Mandibles. The objective was the capture of the Dodecanese by the British to stop Italian surface and submarine units from operating there and harassing naval British convoys from Egypt to the Aegean.

The British were also hoping to occupy Kaso, a small island between the island of Scarpantos and Crete, and turn it into a base for their submarines and torpedo boats. Castellorizo appears to have been the first phase of Operation Mandibles and a prelude to the operation against Kaso. However, all operations in the Dodecanese were then stopped due to lack of adequate shipping.

On 10th February, the R.A.F. in Greece had 4 Blenheim squadrons, and 2 Gladiator squadrons, with 26 Gladiators, 47 Mk.I Blenheims and 7 Mk.IV Blenheims not including the 12 Gladiators handed over to the Greeks. At the end of February the presence of the R.A.F. in Greece was increased considerably with the arrival of three more Squadrons Nos.11 (Blenheims), 112 (Gladiators and Hurricanes) and 33 (Hurricanes). Another Blenheim Squadron, No.113, arrived during March, while No.208 Squadron equipped with Lysanders and Hurricanes, was on its way in April 1941 when the Germans attacked.

The arrival of the Hurricanes in Greece became a major factor in the continuation of the war in Albania, but above all, it strengthened Greek morale, especially after the failure
of the Greeks to achieve their objective of Valona and expel the Italians from Albania. In order to prove the “invincibility” of the Hurricanes, the British flew some of them low over Athens to let them be seen by the joyful Greeks. A few days later, they would prove their invincibility, in fact. On 28th February, a combined Gladiator and Hurricane force encountered Italian planes over Albania. By the end of the low altitude air battle, no fewer than 27 Italian planes had been shot down, without a single loss to the British side. All that, under the eyes of Italian and Greek ground troops, the latter being very jubilant to watch the destruction of the enemy planes one after the other.

In London Churchill was gravely concerned by the prospect of neutral Turkey allowing German troops through Bulgarian territory unhindered, despite having repeatedly stated to both the Greek and the British Governments that it would consider the passage of German troops through Bulgaria as a casus belli. Churchill despatched a telegram to Eden in Cairo which ended as follows: “Do not consider yourselves obligated to a Greek enterprise if in your hearts you feel it will only be another Norwegian fiasco. If no good plan can be made, please say no. But of course you know how valuable success would be.”(113) And to the Cabinet, Churchill said that if the Germans offered the Greeks peace terms such that they could not turn them down, the Greeks “could not be blamed for accepting and indeed their acceptance must not be viewed too tragically”.(114)

Both these statements have a common pattern: that Churchill was having second thoughts about the Greek plan. What is not known is whether Churchill by that telegram to Eden was trying to shift the blame entirely to those in Middle East in case the Greek operation proved to be another disaster. Perhaps Churchill had suddenly realised the futility of the whole affair, now that Turkey had been isolated and hoped to exclude himself from the burden of taking a
decision concerning the Greek case, which might have been for withdrawal.

What is also strange is that Churchill had until now been stressing to Wavell the importance of assisting Greece militarily in order to limit the possibility of Greece yielding naval and air bases to the Axis. Now, in a tone of despair, after the British failure to draw Turkey in the conflict, he was declaring to the Cabinet that Greek acceptance of a German mediation, possibly resulting in the granting of air and naval bases to the Germans, was not to be viewed too tragically. So, either Churchill had not made up his mind whether the occupation of Greece was a liability for the British, or he had been lying to Wavell before or to the Cabinet now. There is also another possibility: that he was now so depressed that he was very pessimistic about the Greek operation without judging objectively its chances of success.

In his scepticism about Metaxas' statement that the Greeks would fight to the bitter end, even if unassisted by Britain, Wavell had suspected the refusal to accept British aid to Greece in January 1941 might be founded on a "political reason". He feared the Greeks would possibly make a last minute deal with the Germans. It seems that Churchill himself was afraid of that, in spite of the numerous Greek declarations to the contrary. This is further evidence of inter-Allied mistrust on the eve of an enemy attack. How could the Allies unite and fight the enemy when they could not trust each other? However such a phenomenon is common in coalition strategy.

Eden telegraphed his reply to London on 21st February in which he said that Dill, Wavell, Longmore and Cunningham had all agreed to do their best to aid Greece now that there was still time to halt the Germans. However, Wavell had pointed out that even if the British acted right now, the lack of aircraft would make that more difficult than anticipated,
while a defence line covering Salonika was considered by him unattainable without strong air cover.

Wavell was prepared to despatch to Greece one armoured brigade, the New Zealand Division, the Polish Independent Brigade, an Australian division and, if need be, a second Australian division and a second armoured brigade. That meant that only tiny forces would remain in the Middle East to face the Italians (and the Germans, though that was still unknown to the British). It was estimated that 53 ships would be required to transport this force to Greece. This would place a heavy strain on all shipping in the Mediterranean, not to mention the fact that Luftwaffe had started to operate from Rhodes in January 1941 and had been laying acoustic and magnetic mines in the Suez Canal blocking its passage quite frequently. (115)

However, all the relevant men in Cairo were in favour of assisting the Greeks. The stakes were high and there was no guarantee that the operation would be a success, but if the British did not aid Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey would be isolated and surrounded. In Eden’s words, the British might have to play trump cards but still the attempt to assist the Greeks should be made. (116) Surprisingly though, the British still hoped for Turkish help even after the Bulgaro-Turkish agreement of 17th February, British wishful thinking once again. Hinsley, commenting on British intelligence during that period, says that the British authorities were better informed about German preparations and plans for the Balkans than about Greek, Yugoslav and Turkish aims. That is why Eden and Dill travelled to the Mediterranean, to find out about their Allies’ intentions. Until then, according to Hinsley, the British Cabinet Defence Committee had been unaware of Greek military planning. (117)
Chapter 5

British Aid or Disaster to Greece?

5a) Confused Allied Agreements February–March 1941

On 22nd February, Eden arrived in Athens escorted by John Dill, Wavell, Longmore and a representative of Cunningham. Their arrival in Greece was secret. They had discussions with the King of the Hellenes, the new Greek Prime Minister, and Papagos. Before the opening of the talks, Koryzis handed Eden the latest Greek declaration reaffirming Greece's absolute determination to fight the Germans in case of their attack whatever the cost and with or without British help. The Greeks possibly did that in order to dispel any British distrust.

Ronald Lewin in his book on General Wavell, The Chief suggests in the handing of that declaration to Eden, prior to any discussion, there was an element of moral blackmail. Lewin believes that the Greeks wanted to impose on the British the moral obligation, having guaranteed Greek independence, to assist them. For that reason, according to Lewin, Koryzis delivered the note before knowing whether Britain would aid Greece or not.(1)

Lewin's argument is absolutely mistaken. There was no Greek moral blackmail of the British side at all. Perhaps Lewin has overlooked that, well before 22nd February, Metaxas had told Palai-ret Greece would fight the Germans to the end. At no time had the Greeks ever insinuated that they would fight the Germans only if assisted by Britain. On the contrary, as shown before, the Greek leadership were determined to fight to the end with British assistance or, if necessary without it. Their attitude was resolute and solid. It did not fluctuate according to whether British looked as if they would help, or not.

Going back to the conference, the discussion opened and common strategy was the first issue. Notes were kept from
both sides, in Greek and English respectively. According to F.O. and War Office files, both the Greeks and the British agreed to hold the Aliakmon line, irrespective of the Yugoslav attitude. The uncertain attitude of Yugoslavia and Turkey made it imperative for all the Greek forces in Eastern Macedonia to concentrate rapidly to the Aliakmon line, abandoning Salonika, Western Thrace and a large part of Macedonia. Though the British records show that the Greeks, especially Papagos, were extremely preoccupied about the Yugoslav attitude, and about how to allocate their forces to accord with it, Papagos in the end agreed to the rapid withdrawal of all the troops in Macedonia to the Aliakmon line, apart from the border troops, who would stay in the Metaxas Line and stall the enemy for as long as they could. The withdrawal to the Aliakmon line did not depend on Yugoslavia's eventual actions. Eden relates in his memoirs that he agreed to that. (2) See Maps 10, 11

De Guingand writes about that meeting, at which he was present:

"I think it was Eden who stressed and enumerated the 'formidable' resources which we were prepared to send over. It sounded pretty good, but if a real expert had carried out a more detailed investigation, I doubt whether those present would have been so satisfied..... He asked that the figures should be swelled with what to my mind were doubtful values. I felt that this was hardly a fair do, and bordering upon dishonesty." "The Greeks referred frequently to the question of Turkey and Yugoslavia. The danger of a German advance through the latter was brought up on many occasions. If either or both these countries came in against Germany, the whole outlook would be vastly improved. And so the Aliakmon Line was decided upon as the strategic plan in the event of our sending our expeditionary force to Greece." (3)

It seems then that the British attempted to fool the Greeks by inflating the number of troops to be sent, hoping to be
able to persuade their allies to accept the force and fight. The British will have remembered that the Greeks, specifically Metaxas, had in January turned down another British proposal for despatch of troops to Greece, simply because the number and the composition of men and material were inadequate. Now it was possible that the Greeks would turn down the British offer again, if it was thought to be still too little. There would be no time for a third British proposal because the Germans were on their way. So, it was vital for the British to persuade the Greeks to accept their present offer; if they did not, the Greeks would have had to face the Germans alone. That would certainly have damaged the prestige of Britain. There was only one solution: to force the British troops on the Greeks. And that could be done only by promising a larger number of British men, so as to impress the Greeks and overcome their fears and their reluctance to accept a small force, and by then imposing on them a British contingent of whatever manpower and quality, just to have British troops fighting alongside Greeks.

Though the Greek records do confirm most of the British accounts there is still a significant discrepancy. Papagos, according to the Greek records and to his book, did actually consider that the Aliakmon line had more chance of holding than the Metaxas Line, which was longer (215 km) and could be easily outflanked from the west through the Axios valley. The disposition of the Greek forces there thus depended exclusively on the Yugoslav attitude. Papagos' ideas had been conveyed to Heywood in detail on 13th February as we have already seen, so he was not actually telling the British anything new. The British should have been considering Papagos' views over the previous week and been in a position to discuss them.

Papagos argued once more that if Yugoslavia chose to fight with the Allies, then the battle against the Germans must take place all along the Metaxas Line or on the Struma line (123 km), both covering Salonika, provided of course that
Yugoslavia covered the western approaches of both lines, which were the weakest element of the whole position. At the same time Salonika would have to be held, since it was the only port from which Yugoslavia could be supplied and maintained in her fight. If Salonika was abandoned before the Yugoslav attitude was clarified, the Yugoslavs would clearly consider that the Anglo-Greek alliance did not care about Yugoslav assistance and Belgrade would probably be discouraged from joining the Allies, even if it had previously wanted to do so. If Yugoslavia decided to keep out of the conflict anyway, then the Aliakmon line was the only sound solution since it was more difficult to outflank. That line was also vulnerable, though, if Yugoslavia attacked Greece along with the Germans, and then the Venetikos line was the most suitable. (4)

A decision to sacrifice Salonika would be a very difficult one, for the abandonment of almost half of Macedonia would certainly cause chaos and uncertainty to the citizens of the evacuated areas. This would produce a large number of stragglers to the south, who would ultimately block the already congested and inadequate Greek network of communications.

There was another reason why the Greeks did not want to evacuate Salonika, an ethnic and political one. The Greek troops facing Bulgaria were locally recruited and the decision to withdraw them to the Aliakmon without a fight was bound to affect seriously their morale and that of their compatriots in Albania. The Greek soldiers in the Metaxas Line and in Eastern Macedonia would feel betrayed and abandoned, if ordered to leave their homes and families to the enemy. (5)

To that one should add also the point that, if the Aliakmon line was chosen, the Greek army in Albania would be forced to withdraw in order to link up with the rest of the Allied troops in the new position. It would be a disaster to order the evacuation of the territories in Albania which were won with so much difficulty and bloodshed in the face of a vastly
superior enemy, who had nevertheless been bitterly humiliated. The spirit of all the units in Albania would be severely affected by a hasty and unreasonable retreat in front of a beaten opponent, particularly since the Greek army in Albania had been, for more than six months, fighting a hard, unequal, battle under appalling weather conditions.

In any case, the army in Albania was altogether lacking in motor transport. It would take several weeks of foot marching to return to Greece and to the Aliakmon line. It was uncertain whether they would get there and if they would be still able to fight as an army or would simply have disintegrated. Even if they arrived as a fighting unit, they would then be called on to face, not just one, but two enemies, the second more powerful than the first. Papagos, therefore, would not readily accept putting at risk the whole six months campaign and the reputation of a nation, without being absolutely sure that Yugoslavia would not join the Allies. He had to be assured of that before ordering any withdrawal to the Aliakmon line. He stressed to the British that he would wait for an official answer from Belgrade, through the British Minister there, before he would proceed with the evacuation of Macedonia. (6)

The British military assistance which the Greeks welcomed in their country was to be, in the first phase, one infantry division, one armoured brigade, and two medium artillery regiments, followed in the second phase by one more infantry division and the Polish Independent Brigade, and then by one additional infantry division. The first contingent of the British force could start landing in Greece 30 days after the decision had been taken and the two other contingents three weeks later. The total of the British forces arriving in Greece would be 97,000 men, 216 field artillery pieces, 202 short-range anti-tank guns, 192 anti-aircraft guns, 32 medium-range anti-tank guns and 142 tanks. (7)

In terms of air power, the situation in Greece was the following: the R.A.F had 1 squadron of Hurricanes, 2 of
Gladiators, 4 of Blenheims and 1 night bomber squadron. At the end of February or in March one more Gladiator squadron could be sent. At the end of March, two of the present Gladiator squadrons could be re-equipped with Hurricanes, and two more Hurricane and Blenheim squadrons might perhaps arrive in Greece. Also twenty night bombers (Wellingtons) would be deployed at short notice from Alexandria to Athens. (8)

Papagos said that the Germans could be expected to transport 23 divisions from Rumania, of which at least two would be armoured and two motorized, supported by 500-600 planes. They could move 7-8 divisions up to the Greek border within 12 days of crossing the Danube. The Aliakmon line would, if it was chosen as the defence line, need 8 divisions, plus 1 or 2 in reserve. But the British had to be trained and equipped for mountain warfare and their wheeled artillery could not be transported on goat tracks. It would have to disassembled and carried in pieces on pack animals. Papagos needed 20-25 days for the evacuation of Eastern Macedonia and Western Thrace and the withdrawal from Albania, starting from the time at which Yugoslavia's attitude was clarified. Papagos suggested that Campbell, the British Minister in Belgrade, should clarify that right away. Finally, Papagos informed the British that the Germans would be able to attack the Aliakmon defence position within 20 days of crossing the Greek frontier. (9)

The landing of the British troops would take place in Volos and Piraeus harbours, if the Aliakmon line was selected and in Salonika if the Metaxas Line was chosen. But even if the evacuation to the River Aliakmon took place, the Greek frontier troops and those in the Metaxas Line would stay at their posts to delay the German attack on Salonika and the Aliakmon. Then they would try to withdraw to the Aliakmon to join the rest of the Allied troops, unless cut off by the pace of the German advance. Papagos stressed to the British
the serious shortage of anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns in the Metaxas Line.

On 23rd February, Eden telegraphed to Churchill that the Greeks had agreed to prepare defence lines on the River Aliakmon and deploy all their forces there (35 battalions, almost the equivalent of 4 divisions, plus one motorised division in Larissa and possibly one more in reserve). He was mistaken about that as we will see below. The British, on their side, were to make a final effort to persuade Yugoslavia and Turkey to join them in the war. On the question of when the Greeks should break off diplomatic relations with Germany and Bulgaria, from the point of view of military security and fifth column and other pro-German activities, the Greeks did not reply, though they implied that this would happen when the Germans crossed the Greek frontier. Perhaps the Greeks still cherished the illusion of being able to escape the German attack, and were thus unwilling to break off diplomatic relations, or perhaps they did not want to provoke the Germans to speed up their attack. In Eden's words:

"We were all impressed by frankness and fair dealing of Greek representatives on all subjects discussed. I am quite sure that it is their determination to resist to the utmost of their strength and that His Majesty's Government had no alternative but to back them whatever the ultimate consequences."

What we can gather from this telegram is that Eden, even though he was in Athens, was still mistaken about the Greek dispositions. He had not grasped the importance of Yugoslavia to the Greek strategy. He informed Churchill that the Greeks would concentrate on the Aliakmon line. He did mention the last attempt to draw Yugoslavia in the conflict, but he did not link that with the Greek strategy, simply because he had not understood how Yugoslavia's attitude was linked to influence Greek strategy. He was unaware that the
last attempt to induce Yugoslavia to fight with the Allies was decisive for the whole Greek position. He did not try to clarify that.

Eden and Dill went to Ankara on 26th February to discover the Turkish attitude to British assistance to Greece. Those discussions with the Turkish leadership were a failure. Though Turkey promised to enter the war sooner or later, it did not want to precipitate a German attack on her which she were not prepared to meet. The Turks argued that they were loyal to Britain and Greece, but had no offensive power at all. If they entered the war at this time, they would be more of a liability than an asset. It would be better if Turkey remained neutral to strengthen her resources and army and then join the Allies. The British party urged Turkey to declare war on Germany if she attacked Greece, but the Turkish side rejected such an action. The Turks spoke of the uncertain Yugoslav attitude, which was not encouraging at all. They were however, ready to join forces with Yugoslavia, if she so desired, in order to stop a German threat to Greece.

At the same time, as had been agreed in Athens, Campbell in Belgrade sought an official answer to Papagos' dilemma. Belgrade's answer as it was conveyed to Eden via the Yugoslav Ambassador to Ankara, was that her forces would defend the country if attacked and would not allow the passage of German troops through her territory, but she could not decide whether she would consider the German passage of troops through Bulgaria as a casus belli. Belgrade pleaded with Britain not to press her to clarify her attitude.

This answer was conveyed to Eden in Ankara on 27th February but he did not communicate it to Athens, as expected. Papagos was therefore unaware of that Yugoslav reply.

On 2nd March, the British party, including Wavell, returned to Athens. There it found very unwelcome news: first of all, Bulgaria had joined the Axis on 1st March and had allowed the Germans on to her soil. Information from the Greek
diplomatic mission in Sofia indicated that the attack on Greece was only a matter of days. At the same time, Bulgarian troops were put on full alert along the Turco-Bulgarian borders. (13)

The second unwelcome news was that Papagos had not initiated the withdrawal of Greek forces to the Aliakmon line from Eastern Macedonia, nor had he ordered withdrawal from Albania, because he had been waiting for the reply from Belgrade. The British were shattered by Papagos’ answer, because they had expected that since the February meetings in Athens, the Greeks would have concentrated their forces on the River Aliakmon. Papagos replied that he had been asking Heywood for the Yugoslav reply every day since Eden's party had left and that Heywood had always answered that he had none. He therefore could not order the evacuation of Eastern Macedonia. Then another blow fell on the British. Papagos was unable to order the evacuation procedures to commence even at this stage, because now it was too late. (14)

Papagos explained that he could not order the withdrawal to the Aliakmon line, now that the Germans were in Bulgaria because he was afraid that the Germans might attack while the Greeks were on the move and catch them off guard. The Germans would probably notice any such movement in Eastern Macedonia and hasten their attack in order to block the retreat of the Greek army to the south. Papagos considered it would also be unwise to order the evacuation of Eastern Macedonia now, because it would cause even more alarm to the local population and the locally recruited troops. Papagos went on to say that he expected a German invasion within 8 days, with 7-8 divisions of which 2-3 would attack through the Struma valley. It would be unwise therefore to order any withdrawal to the Aliakmon. (15)

He concluded that he could not order the retreat of the Greek army in Albania either. The Italians were already superior in numbers and ready to launch a new offensive
and, seeing a Greek retreat, they would probably press on with extra vigour and high morale knowing their Axis ally was at the door of Greece too. It was possible that such a major Italian offensive would break the back of the Greek resistance and cause a massive and uncoordinated Greek retreat. That would have had a detrimental effect on the morale of all the Greek troops and especially those facing the Germans. Papagos proposed instead that all incoming British troops should concentrate along the Metaxas Line in the north. The British, very rightly, said that such an action constituted piecemeal suicide and the matter was left unresolved until the next meeting. 

During the next few hours and days, numerous conferences took place out of which a final agreement (albeit a bad compromise) was reached. Papagos had been pressed hard by the King to be more moderate and less stubborn and the British on their side were less emphatic as well. According to the compromise, the Greeks proposed the following plan: they would supply three divisions (XII, XIX, (motorized) XX) plus seven battalions to man the Aliakmon line alongside the British forces. In addition to that, three more Greek divisions were to be posted to the north to join the frontier troops of the sector and the Metaxas Line garrison.

Let us review some interesting points of the meetings. Though Heywood admitted that Papagos asked him about the reply from Belgrade every day since 22th February, the remaining British representatives pressed Papagos to order the withdrawal from Eastern Macedonia even now. Additionally they wanted at least three Greek divisions along with their forces in the Aliakmon line. When Papagos explained to them that he simply could not find any more available Greek forces, the British demanded that divisions from Albania be withdrawn to reinforce their troops in the Aliakmon. Papagos replied that he could not do so, because he expected a strong Italian attack, which actually materialised on 9th March. Then Dill said that he could not
allow the British forces to arrive in Greece, unless he was given that those additional Greek divisions.

It was at this point that the King and Koryzis exerted very strong pressure on Papagos to withdraw his arguments, otherwise the British would not assist Greece, with all the subsequent military but, above all, political consequences. Papagos had to back down, even though he protested vigorously, about the British stubbornness not to bring their forces unless given what they wanted. Actually, if we speak about moral blackmail, as Lewin previously did (so unsuccessfully), it was the British who demanded that they be given at least three Greek divisions plus their own forces, and all of the remaining Greek forces in Eastern Macedonia in the Allakmon, otherwise they would not come at all. It was the British, through the King, who exerted pressure on Papagos to back down. If they were not given what they wanted, they would not come at all. That is blackmail, and if it had been left to Papagos he surely would not have submitted to the British even at the cost of fighting the Germans alone. At the end, the British got almost what they wanted. (17)

The British were at first puzzled by Papagos proposal: it seemed to them the worst of both worlds. The Allied forces were already very weak to hold the German attack. To have them divided into two separate fronts was not just illogical but unsound strategically. It was far better to concentrate on one front. A division of forces allowed the Germans to tackle the two fronts separately, and thus have more chance of breaking each.

On 5th March Eden telegraphed London that Papagos had not proceeded with the promised withdrawal, and he was reluctant to order it now. Papagos, according to Eden, was unaccommodating and defeatist and the British had to enlist the aid of the King who was calm and helpful. The British had to choose between Papagos's plan - placing British forces along the Metaxas Line - which was disastrous, the offer of
three divisions in Aliakmon position, which the military
advisers on the spot estimated that still had some prospects
of success, and withdrawing British offer of assistance
altogether. The last alternative meant that Greece would
definitely secumb to the Axis. The British chose the second,
not only because it had some chances of success, but also
because the moral obligation of Britain to assist Greece still
existed. The risks had increased considerably and the gamble
was very great indeed, but it seems that the British could
see something positive coming out of it.(18)

It is very difficult to know who was to blame for the
misunderstanding. Comparing the British and the Greek
records of the discussions held in Athens in February 1941
there are apparent inconsistencies. It is possible that
Papagos had gone back on his word. Right to the end, he
insisted that he was right when he spoke of the Yugoslav
reply as the decisive factor in the (Allied) Greek strategy.
There are indications that he had been influenced not to
withdraw by the factors explained above. An additional
factor that must have influenced him is the following:
Papagos had received a letter dated 16th February from the
Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army of Eastern Macedonia
(E.M.A.) Lieutenant-General Constantine Bakopoulos, who
urged him to stay on the Metaxas Line and give battle there.
Bakopoulos told him that the line was considered, if not
impregnable, well designed and fortified, that there was a
good chance of halting the enemy there, and that
abandonment of the line without a fight would strike a great
blow at the morale of the troops and the public.(19)

It is possible that, together with the factors that Papagos
personally had in mind, this letter might have caused him to
reneege on his agreement with the British in February.
Evidence that Papagos' morale had been badly shaken, can be
found in the British record of the final agreement on 4th
March. The King had explicitly said to the British, in front of
Papagos that: "General Papagos, now that he had decided to
face the Germans, would do it with the same determination whatever the troops available and whatever plan was adopted.” [author’s emphasis] (20) Papagos left that unanswered. It should be noted that the above phrase exists only in the British record of the talks. The Greek record does not contain such a phrase.

Additionally, Eden’s own judgement about the Greek share in the misunderstanding is the following:

"On reflection, I have no doubt that it was the political implications of withdrawing Greek troops from Macedonia which proved too much even for the stalwart intentions of the Greek Government. .....To uncover Salonika, Greece’s second greatest city, and expose the Macedonian plain to an unhindered German advance, was probably more than even this people, whose courage had been so superb, could have endured.” (21)

Further evidence of Papagos’ inability to direct the Greek war strategy can be found in Metaxas’ diary and Koliopoulos’ book. Metaxas has an entry on 16th December 1940 where he calls Papagos insubordinate. Additionally, when Koritsa fell to the Greeks, Metaxas has said ironically that “Alec [Alexander] leading [the army] brought the fall of Koritsa!” (22) That sarcasm was part of a wider criticism of Papagos who stubbornly remained in Athens during the war, and limited his visits to the front. It should be noted that out of the 170 days that the Italo-Greek and Italo-German-Greek war lasted, Papagos had visited the front units for only 49 days. The King too seemed not to appreciate Papagos and his abilities, though he knew that the General was a staunch royalist.

Similarly, Koliopoulos refers to an interview he had with Metaxas’ daughter, Loukia. It seems that she was sent by her father to the front on 14th January 1941 to meet the commander of the II Greek Division Major-General George Lavdas and to learn his view on Papagos’ capabilities.
Metaxas possibly sent his daughter to the front, instead of any other person, for reasons of secrecy and absolute trust. Metaxas always intended to replace Papagos, since he regarded him as unequal to the task. Lavdas's view, according to Koliopoulos, was the same too: he recommended that Metaxas should take the direct command of the Greek armed forces. That Metaxas did not replace Papagos was probably only because he died the same month.

However, it seems that Koliopoulos was somehow mistaken. First of all, Lavdas recommended that the King should take the direct command of the Greek armed forces, but with Metaxas and Papagos in his side. Therefore Lavdas considered Papagos able to command the troops. Secondly, Metaxas' diary has two entries on 14th and 16th January 1941 where the Premier referred to his daughter's trip to the front and he questioned whether she should go. Surely, if he had planned the trip of his daughter he could not have questioned the need for her to go.(23)

A general supporter of Papagos is De Guingand, who writes that Papagos was "an impressive figure. His name had become a byword, and he was considered a national hero and a fine soldier. His strategy and leadership in Albania had been of a high order."(24) Churchill too, while having an argument with Dill, in December 1940 has said that: "...he [Churchill] complained he could get nothing done.....he wished he had Papagos to run it [the British army]."(25)

This however, does not mean that the British side was not committing a mistake as well. If Papagos had pointed out clearly to Eden in Athens on 22nd February that he considered the Yugoslav reply very important, it is astonishing that Eden should not have informed Papagos of the disappointing Belgrade reply as soon as he was told of it in Ankara. Eden knew about the uncertain Yugoslav attitude from 27th February, but he waited until 2nd March, when he returned to Athens, to tell Papagos. So, either Eden had not understood the importance of the Belgrade reply for the
Greeks, or he simply ignored it to pass it on to Athens at the moment he heard it. Or both. Perhaps he omitted it to pass it on because he had not understood its significance for Papagos.

Evidence that the British ought to have grasped the importance of the Yugoslav attitude for the Greeks, and ultimately for the Allied war plan, comes from a discussion between Papagos and a member of the British Military Mission in Athens, Colonel Salisbury-Jones, on 20th February 1941, two days before the arrival of the British party in Athens. Salisbury-Jones telegraphed to Wavell:

"Have just had further talk with General Papagos who gave me following brief appreciation in regard to German threat through Bulgaria. Uncertain attitude of Yugoslavia made it very difficult for him to decide on fixed plan of defence. If Yugoslavia were to collaborate with Greeks Germans would probably not make serious efforts down the Struma valley owing to vulnerability of this line to attack from Yugoslavia. Under these conditions possibility of defending Greek-Bulgarian frontier might be seriously considered. But if Yugoslavia remained neutral Salonika would have to be abandoned ......he had seriously to consider necessity of withdrawing Greek divisions now from eastern Macedonia to Aliakmon position ......Capital importance of Yugoslav position being clarified cannot be over-estimated." [author's emphasis] (26)

Another interesting point concerning the British contribution to the Allied misunderstanding is the one made by Christopher Montague Woodhouse during the Diethnes Simbosio gia ta 50 Hronia apo to Epos 1940-41, which took place in Salonika in 1991. He pointed out that Heywood was the Head of the British Military Mission in Athens in 1940-41 and the liaison officer between the Greeks and the British. However, though Papagos asked him every day from 22nd February until 2nd March about the reply from Belgrade, he took no steps whatsoever to make clear to
Papagos that he must order the evacuation of the Greek forces in Eastern Macedonia without waiting for a reply from Belgrade, positive or not. Similarly, he took no steps at all to inform Eden and/or Wavell and/or Dill, that Papagos was doing nothing to implement what they had supposedly agreed until he had a definite reply from Belgrade. If he had done both, or even one of the two, the misunderstanding would have been resolved immediately. But Heywood did neither. Additionally, neither the British, nor the Greeks, did they try to compare and contrast their own set of records of the 22nd of February. If they had done so, they would have found the discrepancies and they would have solved the issue. (27)

Cruickshank makes the same point. Heywood had attended the February meetings and he must have understood the conclusion. If the Greeks were falling down on a commitment of enormous importance to the British, why did not he inform the British representatives. For Cruickshank, there can be two explanations. Either that Heywood agreed with Papagos' understanding or the British Military Mission had failed in its task. Cruickshank writes, that Lieutenant-General Maitland Wilson wrote off the Military Mission as useless. Cruickshank goes on to make a much more important question. If Eden was left with the impression that the Greeks would immediately withdraw to the Aliakmon (irrespective of the Yugoslav attitude), and that Papagos' proposal was unacceptable, then what was the urgency and importance of asking Yugoslavia. Did Eden have in mind, to move back to a frontier line the Greek and British troops, after the former had evacuated Macedonia (and Yugoslavia had decided not to support the Allies), and if such a scheme existed, should he have discussed it with the Greeks during the February talks?. Cruickshank also argues that Papagos plan to wait for Yugoslavia, to make up her mind, and then to proceed with his dispositions may have been stupid but it was understandable. (28)
On this matter we can add one more fact. While Heywood stood idly by from 22nd February until 2nd March without sounding the alarm about the delay to either Papagos or the British in London and/or Cairo, Papagos seems to have been inactive too. Since he saw Heywood every day and received the same negative reply from him, why did he not try to stress to him the urgency of the matter? On the contrary, Papagos, even though he was waiting "impatiently" for the news from Belgrade in order to initiate, or not, the withdrawal, seemed to show a remarkable patience in listening every single day (22nd February-2nd March) to Heywood giving him the exact same negative reply. He seemed not to worry that the Yugoslav attitude on which the entire battle of Greece was to be based, was not cleared up yet. And still, it seems he took no steps for himself to find out, on his own, about the Yugoslav attitude, knowing that the British had no news for him. Instead, he left the matter to drag on, until it was too late to do anything, even if Yugoslavia had clarified her attitude. However it seems that the Greek Government simultaneously with the British, attempted to find out about the Yugoslav attitude. On 24th February, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs telegraphed to Simopoulos in London that, according to the Greek embassy in Belgrade, the Yugoslav Premier and Council of Ministers had not clarified their attitude concerning a German attack on Bulgaria and neither were they willing to do so. Similarly, on 27th February, Simopoulos informed Athens that the Foreign Office had been unsuccessful in discovering the Yugoslav attitude during the Yugoslav-German talks.(29) Thus, in some way, though indirectly and unofficially, the Greek Government was aware of the Yugoslav non-committal attitude.

At the end of the meetings in March, the British felt that they had been deceived by the Greeks and that Papagos was making unfounded excuses. It is interesting to note that according to Koliopoulos the Greek record of the meetings of
February and March 1941 had "vanished" and that there were indications that it had been put away into "safety" in April 1941, by order of Papagos. Koliopoulos believed that only the British record of the February and March meetings existed, but this is not the case. The Greek records, signed by Papagos, are at the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and have been published in 1980. Another question that one should ask is, what would Papagos have done even if he had the Yugoslav reply quite soon? Taking into account that the Yugoslav reply was non-committal, Papagos, even if the reply from Belgrade had been received in Athens early enough to make a point, would have had to make his moves accordingly. But the reply was ambivalent, neither negative, nor positive. How would he have interpreted this reply vis-à-vis his military dispositions? Would he have considered the non-committal Yugoslav attitude - even if it was given at the earliest moment - as sufficiently negative, as to authorize the withdrawal to the Aliakmon, or would he have waited for a more precise reply? If he had chosen the second choice, the matter would have ended in the same way as it was now.

Between 7th and 9th March, there had been a series of new discussions held in Athens with a representative of the Yugoslav army Major-General Milissav Perichic, of the Yugoslav General Staff. The British hoped to lure the Yugoslavs into battle and instructed Campbell, who had been summoned to Athens for consultation with Eden, to inform the Prince Regent that Britain was willing to study with sympathy the revision of the Yugoslav-Italian frontier in Istria at a later peace conference. (30)

The manoeuvre did not work. The Yugoslav representative was not authorized to discuss the Yugoslav's army preparations for battle or its concentration points, nor to initiate a common plan between the possible three Allies. Simply, he wished to find out what Yugoslavia could expect from Britain. He pointed out that the Yugoslav General Staff
attached special importance to three things: a) naval assistance in the Adriatic, for the evacuation of the Yugoslav army, in case it was beaten by the Germans and had no other way to escape complete annihilation; b) the immediate reinforcement of the Yugoslav army in tanks, aircraft, anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns in which it was lacking; and c) the importance of keeping Salonika as a base of supply and maintenance for their army in the south. It seems that Major-General Perichic had come to Athens with a very defeatist attitude; and the meetings, held in the presence of Lieutenant-General Maitland Wilson who was to command the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F) in Greece, were fruitless. (31)

The Allies made clear to Perichic the importance of getting Yugoslavia into the war and the British party promised that if Yugoslavia joined the Allied camp, she would get food, ammunition, guns, aircraft and anything else she needed to keep her going in the fight. Possibly the British could not deliver all the above mentioned material to the Yugoslavs, but they promised it, as a last chance to draw her into the conflict.

From these discussions held in Athens, we can surely give credit to Papagos for one thing only: that he had accurately predicted the significance of Salonika for the Yugoslav General Staff. If the withdrawal of the Greek forces in Eastern Macedonia to the Aliakmon line had started before the Yugoslav-Allied talks in Athens, let alone completed, it is sure that Yugoslavia would have been less likely to send a representative to Athens to discuss with the Allies its war planning, and much less likely she would fight on their side. While Yugoslavia remained uncommitted, there was the faint possibility that Salonika could be the decisive factor to persuade her to turn to the Allied side. Actually Salonika became the apple of discord for Yugoslavia, since it was promised that city but from the other side of the hill, as we will see below.
The effect on Britain of the discussions held in Athens between 2nd and 9th March was an utter disappointment. The British thought that the Greeks would have kept their promises about the Aliakmon line. The Chiefs of Staff considered the new situation and agreed that it had changed for the worse. The failure of the Greeks to keep the agreement of 22nd February, the ambivalent attitude of Yugoslavia and Turkey and the rapid deployment of the German forces in Bulgaria, decreased significantly any slight hopes there had been that the situation in Greece could be turned to Britain's advantage. According to Antonios Korantis, while on 7th March 1941 Wavell farewelled Dill from Cairo, said "Jack, I hope that you will take part in my courtmartial when this enterprise is being thought over again." (32) The previous day Wavell has said that, "I am afraid there will be a lot of bloody noses this spring in The Aegean" and he had expressed his anxiety to Cunningham as well. (33)

The Suez Canal was blocked by German mines and was not expected to be cleared before 11th March. That was another sharp blow to British transportation capacities. The operation against the Dodecanese was postponed indefinitely for lack of adequate transport since all available vessels were being kept for the landing in Greece. However, the Chiefs of Staff in London believed that since Eden, Dill and Wavell had reached agreement with the Greeks, it meant that some hope still existed. Churchill had a different opinion. For once he weighted up the pros and cons and he sounded the general alarm in Cairo. He certainly thought of cancelling the impending landing in Greece. In a telegram to Eden in Cairo, he pointed out that Britain must not "urge Greece against her better judgement into a hopeless resistance".

"We must liberate Greeks from feeling bound to reject a German ultimatum. If on their own, they resolve to fight, we must to some extent share their ordeal. Loss of Greece and Balkans by no means a major catastrophe for us, provided Turkey remains, honest neutral. We could take Rhodes and
consider plans for 'Influx' (descent on Sicily) or Tripoli. We are advised from many quarters that our ignominious ejection from Greece would do us more harm in Spain and Vichy than the fact of submission of Balkans, which with our scanty forces alone we have never been expected to prevent."(34)

Churchill's telegram stands in direct conflict with his previous despatches. For the first time, he was not only proposing not to go ahead with the operation, but also to turn Britain's attention to other war plans and operations. He had concluded already that the Greeks' was a lost cause. Was he trying to cover his tracks? Surprisingly though, the one man who had always made objections to the Greek enterprise, was now committed to it. That was Wavell. He now favoured proceeding with it, though not welcoming it. In that crucial moment the roles were reversed. Wavell had Eden and Palai ret on his side, and also Cunningham and Longmore though they had misgivings about the operation. Churchill had still not taken the Greeks at their word. He was questioning whether they should be compelled to say 'No' to an appealing German proposal, when for the Greeks it was out of the question that they should say 'Yes'.

The reply to Churchill's telegram came from Palai ret in Athens. Palai ret was very emotional and sensitive to the Greek cause, an unfamiliar approach for a diplomat.

"I need not emphasize to you the effect of our now withdrawing from the agreement actually signed between Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Greek Commander-in-Chief and now in process of execution here by General Wavell himself. How can we possibly abandon the King of Greece after the assurances given to him by the Commander-in-Chief and Chief of the Imperial General Staff as to reasonable chances of success?. This seems to me unthinkable. We shall be pilloried by the Greeks and the world in general as going back on our word. There is no question of 'liberating the Greeks from feeling bound to reject the ultimatum'. They have decided to fight Germany
alone if necessary. The question is whether we help or abandon them." (35)

Palairet was doing everything in his power to persuade his superiors to support the Greek operation. To Eden, in Cairo, he had sent another telegram to inform him that the King of the Hellenes was absolutely determined to fight the Germans and that he and Papagos had every confidence in final victory against the enemy. The King, however, had asked for the rapid increase of the air force in order to break German air superiority. Wilson too had seen Papagos, who was very optimistic and anxious to cooperate and help in every possible way. (36)

Eden must have considered carefully all Palairet's latest despatches and talked with the three Commanders-in-Chief in Cairo, because in his despatch to London, he reported that all the Commanders-in-Chief, as well as Dill and himself, agreed that though heavy commitments and grave risks appeared to dominate the situation in Greece, still they were supporting a British expedition to assist their ally. (37) Churchill, however, was still uncertain about reaching a decision.

He reminded Eden that the British should not urge the Greeks to fight a lost battle and ruin their country, but also underlined to the Cairo officials that most of the troops to be engaged in the operation in Greece were from New Zealand and Australia with all the problems that entailed with those Dominions. Britain had assured their governments that those troops would not be sent to a massacre and that care should be taken for the withdrawal of the force, if their objective proved to be unattainable. It was on the basis that Dill, Wavell and the other Commanders-in-Chief in Cairo, approved of the expedition that the Australian and New Zealand Governments had so far given their consent for the operation. Eden, therefore, was told to re-think the feasibility of the operation in the light of the British assurances to the two Dominions. This campaign was not to
be undertaken solely on the grounds of a noblese oblige to Greece, but it was imperative to make a precise military judgement before the operation could proceed.(38)

The reply to Churchill's memorandum was sent from Cairo on 7th March as the first British troops started to disembark in Piraeus. The position in the Middle East and Greece was re-examined closely by the people concerned in Cairo, and their unanimous decision was that the operation should go on. General J.C. Smuts, when asked, had the same view regarding the operation. Eden wrote in that reply:

"Collapse of Greece without further effort on our part to save her by intervention on land, after the Libyan victories had, as all the world knows, made forces available would be the greatest calamity. Yugoslavia would then certainly be lost, nor can we feel confident that even Turkey would have the strength to remain steadfast if the Germans and the Italians were established in Greece without the effort on our part to resist them. No doubt our prestige should suffer if we are ignominiously ejected, but we should presumably escape the ignominy, and in any event to have fought and suffered in Greece would be less damaging to us than to have left Greece to her fate."(39)

Additional encouragement for the campaign in Greece came from another source, somewhat indirectly. A close personal friend of President Roosevelt, Colonel William Donovan, was visiting the Balkans and Middle East as a special emissary of the United States Secretary of the Navy. Though he was not on an official mission, his report influenced British policy a lot. Before he actually wrote the report, he was confident that a Balkan bloc could be formed, if Yugoslavia and Turkey participated.

Colonel Donovan was pretty sure that the Balkans offered a splendid opportunity for Britain to re-enter the European Continent and possibly upset the German plans. Provided that Britain acted right away and could supply and maintain an army in the Balkan peninsula, as well as replenish the
Allied Balkan armies, there was a fair chance that the Allies could beat the Germans and reach the Ploesti oil-fields. Donovan’s report was bound to influence the President, and indirectly the American public, for or against Britain’s position in the war. His report therefore strengthened the view that the risks in Greece were worth taking, while on the other hand, a British refusal to assist Greece would be interpreted in America as weakness and as indifference to the suffering of a small Allied nation, whose independence Britain had unilaterally guaranteed. Such a course would certainly damage the image of Britain with the American public and on the American political scene. (40)

Now that the dice was finally cast to support Britain’s only free Ally in Europe, the British started a marathon race hoping, once more, to persuade Turkey and/or Yugoslavia to fight for Greece. Although Turkey had clarified its attitude on 17th February 1941, the British believed that a fresh meeting should be held with the Turks. It was a hopeless diplomatic and political battle from the very start, since the British side could not or did not want to accept Turkish insistence on neutrality. In the end, the British had to accept it. The Commanders-in-Chief in Cairo accepted that since Turkey had no actual offensive power, it would have become a liability rather than an asset as the Allies required if it had entered the war at this time. In the worst case, she might provoke a German attack on her.

The Foreign Office had a different view. It believed that a Turkish declaration of war would outweigh any momentary military disadvantages. It was agreed, however, that the Commanders’ opinion should count more than that of the diplomats, since they were on the spot and could judge more accurately. An approach was to be made to Turkey to persuade her to communicate to Belgrade an encouragement of the Prince Regent to strengthen the Yugoslav Government’s opposition to Germany. A meeting was arranged with the Turks in Cyprus on 18th and 19th March. (41)
The Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister, Sukru Saracoglu, though pressed by Eden to inform Yugoslavia that Turkey would consider an attack on Salonika as a *casus belli*, refused to take any such step. His reason was that Turkey was not militarily ready to implement such an action if required, and that Yugoslavia might prove reluctant to coordinate its activities with Ankara. Though he promised to send a message to Belgrade, informing it of the Turkish view of any possible German attack on Greece, he did not in the end do even that. (42)

At the same time, Churchill, possibly anxious about the prospects of the impending British campaign in Greece, instructed Eden to investigate why Papagos did not try to withdraw three or four divisions from Albania and deploy them in the Aliakmon line. To Churchill, Papagos’ strategic dispositions seemed extremely dangerous and exposed. He argued that time was still running in favour of Papagos, since the German attack had not commenced yet and he could move some of his troops very quickly. (43) But Papagos had already decided that victory was to be maintained on the Albanian front, irrespective of the war situation on the other two defence lines.

A last British approach to Yugoslavia was made as well, through Campbell in Belgrade. Eden hoped that he could persuade the Yugoslavs to allow him or Dill to visit Belgrade and discuss the situation with the Prince Regent and the Yugoslav General Staff. The Yugoslav Government replied that it did not wish such a visit right at that time. They were under strong pressure from Germany to enter the Axis alliance. (44) Though the Yugoslav Premier continued to assure the Greek and British missions that Yugoslavia would never agree to sign the Tripartite Agreement, information on 17th and 16th March strongly suggested that Belgrade was on the brink of capitulating to Germany’s wishes.

Churchill and the British Minister in Cairo, Terence Shore, a close friend of Prince Paul, addressed letters to Dr.
Cvetkovic, the Yugoslav Premier, and to the Prince Regent, urging them to resist the German menace. The British were hoping that the Serbs who were traditionally pro-British and the Prince himself, who had studied in Oxford and was married to a Greek, would bring to bear opposition to the Croats and their pro-Axis inclination. But in vain.

On 23rd March, it became known that Yugoslavia, under German pressure since November 1940, which had risen in February and March 1941, had decided to sign the Pact. Yugoslavia was given only a few hours to decide whether it would sign the Axis or not. Yugoslavia joined the Agreement on 25th March in Vienna. The Yugoslav Premier and three other Ministers decided to abstain and did not sign. Three other Ministers decided to resign. Yugoslavia was promised in return for its collaboration with the Axis an outlet to the Aegean Sea in full sovereignty, including among other areas, Salonika and its hinterland; Mussolini, too, gave his agreement. Yugoslavia was also given, by Germany, the promise that her soil would not be violated.

Like Bulgaria, which received the area from the River Evros to the River Struma, including the whole of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, for joining the Tripartite Agreement, Yugoslavia did not fail to understand the significance of Salonika. Once more, the mainland territorial disputes among the Balkan countries, as so often from the Macedonian Question and the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 even to the present day, (Yugoslav civil war and the dispute over the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of "Macedonia") became the bait in the hands of Great Powers to catch the weaker Balkan nations and to manipulate and coerce them.

Only hours before, the Yugoslav Foreign Affairs Minister, Cincar Marcovic, had explicitly told the Greek diplomatic representative in Belgrade that Salonika remained of vital importance for his country and she would not allow the passage of German troops through Yugoslav territory for an attack on Greece. Similarly, Yugoslavia would not assist in
the transportation of the German soldiers to the Greco-
Yugoslav borders. For the Yugoslavs, according to Marcovic,
the control of Salonika by Greece was the only real assurance
for Yugoslavia, so she would not allow Salonika to be
threatened. Marcovic went as far as to declare to the Greek
Ambassador that Yugoslavia was thinking of an attack on
Albania to clear the Italians and secure the Mediterranean.(47) Clearly Marcovic wanted to disorientate
and deceive the Greek Ambassador.

5b) Last Ray of Hope 25th March-6th April 1941

Evidence provided from Belgrade to London and Athens
indicated that the Serbs were uneasy with the Agreement
and the feeling among the population was very high indeed.
Campbell believed that a coup d'etat was imminent. Prior to
the signing of the Tripartite Agreement, on 24th March,
Campbell was given full authority by Eden to support an
uprising to overthrow any government that was ready to sell
Yugoslavia to the Axis. This did not materialise then, but
early on 27th March it took place. Prince Paul, the Premier
and the Minister for War were interned. The coup d'etat was
instigated by General Dusan Simovic, formerly Chief of the
Air Staff, and General Bora Mirkovic, Commander-in-Chief of
the Yugoslav air force.

General Simovic had formed a new government with the
consent of the eighteen-years-old years King Peter II. The
jubilation in Belgrade, London, Cairo and Athens was great.
Churchill had instructed Campbell to "pester, nag and bite.
Not to take a no for an answer, to cling on the Yugoslav
Government and not to allow himself to be distanced from
the Yugoslavs."(48) His advice had paid off. Eden and Dill
were disheartened upon seeing the Yugoslav commitment to
the Axis and decided to return home, since there was nothing
else they could do. The news of the Belgrade uprising found
them in Malta. They decided to make an about turn and
return to Athens, to discuss the new prospects with the Greeks, which were considerably more hopeful.

Churchill, addressing the Conservative Central Council, said that Yugoslavia had found her soul. But was that enough? Churchill hoped that Britain, Greece, Yugoslavia and possibly Turkey could make up 70 divisions in contrast with Germany's less than 30. Though qualitatively inferior to Germany's, the numerical difference could make up for the lack of quality. These forces, if combined, could hold the Germans for a long time. Germany, clearly caught off guard by the unexpected resistance in Yugoslavia, had two options: either to attack now with the existing forces at her disposal; or bring up new ones.

In both cases according to Churchill, the Allies were given some extra time. In the first instance, Germany would have to face superior enemies in a geographical context which was unfamiliar to her and unsuitable for fast, deep armour and motorized movement. Moreover, Germany would have to make war on a hostile territory, at the end of long, and unfriendly lines of communications and transportation and, it was to be hoped, under unfavourable climatic conditions as well. There was the possibility that the Allies could beat the Germans. If the Germans chose the second option they would be forced to waste time bringing up new units and thus provide the Allies with equal time to strengthen themselves and prepare their defences.\(^\text{(49)}\)

British intelligence estimated, very inaccurately, that following the Yugoslav \textit{coup d'\^{e}tat} Germany would require 32 or 33 additional divisions including four motorized and three or four armoured divisions, in order to attack both Greece and Yugoslavia simultaneously. Actually, Germany required only twelve more. On that error, the British rested all their hopes that they would have time to organise better Yugoslav, Greek, British and if possible, Turkish forces, before Germany could transport to the front all those supposedly needed divisions. As Hinsley suggests, it was only
on 4th April after Dill had visited Belgrade, that the British understood the actual and tragic unreadiness of Yugoslavia's fighting capabilities. (50)

Meanwhile, important meetings were taking place in Athens. Lieutenant-Generals Bakopoulos and John Kotulas, commanding the Eastern Macedonia (E.M.A.) and Central Macedonia (C.M.A.) Armies respectively, were pressing Papagos to concentrate all available forces on one line, the Aliakmon, seeing that the dispersion of power was the worst course of all; though Bakopoulos during a conversation in Salonika with Brigadier Charrington, commanding the 1st British Armoured Brigade in Greece had strongly promoted the Metaxas Line as the most suitable to withstand the attack. Charrington at the beginning, under the pressure of Bakopoulos had favoured the Metaxas Line. At that conversation in Salonika, Bakopoulos claimed that the dispersion of power would be ascribed as a great strategical mistake, and Charrington replied that the mistake was that the E.M.A did not move its forces along with the British in the Aliakmon.

Once Yugoslavia joined the Axis, and the political reasons for which the Beles-Nestos line was initially suggested now ceased to exist, forced Bakopoulos to promote the Aliakmon line; taking into consideration that this line was the only one which the British favoured. Bakopoulos hoped that with the use of British motor vehicles (the British offered 50, though the Greeks needed at least 500) in addition to the existent naval, road and rail transportation, it would be possible to transport the majority of the E.M.A. to the Aliakmon within 5-6 days. Initially Papagos was against such a plan, suggesting that there was not enough time for the E.M.A. to withdraw, and if the Germans attacked while E.M.A. was on the move to the Aliakmon, then, that army would be forced to fight under very unfavourable conditions. Bakopoulos suggested, that even under those conditions some of the units of the E.M.A. would have managed to withdraw to the
Aliakmon; on the contrary, if E.M.A remained and fought along the Metaxas Line, then its fate was sealed. At that moment, Papagos, clearly influenced by the opinion of Bakopoulos and Kotulas, seemed to agree and left to order the evacuation of Eastern Macedonia; but as he went to issue the order, news of the Belgrade coup came and he decided to stand by his initial decision to give battle on the Metaxas Line. (51)

From 28th March another meeting took place in Athens between the Greeks and the British, in view of the unexpected changes taking place in Yugoslavia. Papagos was now not only against transporting all the forces to the Aliakmon, but was proposing to transfer all the forces in Central Macedonia to the Bulgarian theatre of operations. He was promoting the idea of a common front line that would stretch from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, including Turkish and Yugoslav forces. He was counting on the 27 divisions of Yugoslavia - each one having 4 regiments and therefore equivalent to 2½ Greek divisions - and the 28 of Turkey in Eastern Thrace. (52) However, as we will see below, the quality of the Yugoslav forces was of doubtful value.

He pointed out that a combined Greco-Yugoslav attack in Albania, would not only clear the Italians from there, but would also enable the Yugoslavs, who lacked armour and anti-tank guns to supply themselves from the ample booty of the Italians. Papagos reckoned that two or three Yugoslav divisions would be enough to start operations in Albania. The Greek Commander-in-Chief was hoping to form a Salonika salient supported by Yugoslav, Greek, British and Turkish forces, in order to protect the city and close the gap to the west of the Metaxas Line, where it could be outflanked by the Germans. (53)

The British were reluctant to commit all the Aliakmon forces to the north without any firm assurance from Yugoslavia that she would help the Allies. The British proposed to wait until Belgrade had made up its mind about
whether to assist the Allies or not. Though, until then, Yugoslavia had not made up its mind, Wilson, agreed with Papagos that the western part of the Metaxas Line could be reinforced with one Greek division, and with the 1st British Armoured Brigade. Campbell was instructed to inform Simovic that his decision was crucial for the Anglo-Greek coalition and to ask whether he wanted to have a British representative in Belgrade to plan common action. This time the answer was positive and Dill was despatched to the Yugoslav capital. (54)

Unfortunately, the arrival of Dill in Belgrade did not produce the expected results. The new Yugoslav Government was very confused. They did not want to provoke the Germans by denouncing the agreement but certainly did not want to ratify it. They needed time to prepare. The Yugoslavs were aware that the Germans would attack them in any case but they were trying to stall in order to gain time. Similarly, they could not attack in Albania. The Yugoslav representatives informed Dill of the deficiencies of the Yugoslav army in tanks and aeroplanes and called on Britain to supply them. General Simovic assured Dill of his country’s determination to fight the Germans and he went as far as to declare that if Salonika were threatened by Germany, even without Yugoslavia being attacked, she would feel obliged to aid Greece militarily.

However, he told Dill that Yugoslav willingness to fight was also dependent on the Croat minority which was reluctant to fight the Germans, owing to their pro-German feelings and to their geographically exposed position. Finally, the Yugoslavs said that strong Allied forces should concentrate in the Doiran area, which the Yugoslavs believed was the weakest point of the Allied defence. The next day, Simovic decided to retract his commitment to assist Greece militarily without Yugoslavia being attacked. He wished, however, that Allied staff talks should commence forthwith. (55)
During 3rd and 4th April 1941, staff talks took place at the Kenali railway station between Papagos, Wilson, Heywood, D'Albiac, Admiral Turle, General Yankovic and another Yugoslav representative. It seems that again the Yugoslav Staff did not trust the Allies, or did not at any rate wish to communicate to them its plans for defending South-Eastern Yugoslavia and the Struma valley. Thus the discussion was limited from the start and was unproductive. Even more, the Yugoslav Government was completely without information as to the B.E.F.'s actual strength in Greece. They believed that the British had brought to Greece one armoured division and four motorized ones. Wilson informed Yankovic that the British force in Greece consisted of one armoured brigade and one infantry division, with two more infantry divisions to follow in three and six weeks time. (56)

Yankovic announced that now they understood the actual strength of the B.E.F. this was a bitter disappointment for all of them. It might have been better if the British had not informed him of their actual forces in Greece. First, there was an issue of military security; and second and most important, the Yugoslavs, were more likely to take their chances with the Allies if they remained under the impression that the British forces were larger than they actually were. Now that the truth was accidentally revealed to them, they could easily understand that the Anglo-Greek coalition had no chance at all against the Germans and consequently would not care to assist them. Of course, at some point, the Yugoslavs would have found out the truth about the B.E.F's real strength in Greece, but by then, they would perhaps have been committed to fighting and would not have found it easy to pull back, even if they wanted to. Anyway, the British had tried to deceive the Greeks during the February talks in Athens, when they inflated the forces they were prepared to send to Greece. At that time, their trick had worked. They should have attempted the same
trick with Yankovic, instead of telling him bluntly the actual strength of the B.E.F. in Greece. But at the February talks the British had Eden with them; he being a diplomat knew how to manoeuvre the talks. Unfortunately, only military men were present at the Kenali railway station.

Papagos went on to ask what Yugoslavia was doing to defend herself. He proposed to Yankovic that since Yugoslavia was threatened by forces all around her (in Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania), it was better to concentrate her forces in the south, on the line from Skopje to the Greco-Yugoslav borders. This would assist the Yugoslavs by shortening their front and would at the same time cover the gap in the west of the Metaxas Line. By concentrating forces in the south, instead of defending the whole of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslavs had more possibilities of blocking any German motorized and armoured offensive, since the south was primarily mountainous and rocky, with few roads. Altogether it did not favour rapid deployment of the above mentioned forces. (57)

The Yugoslavs, would not only have a better chance of halting the Germans, but they would also be able to assist the Greeks in the protection of Salonika. If the Yugoslav army remained extended as it was, the enemy, by attacking from many directions simultaneously, would take advantage of the plains and valleys in the north of the country to make his approach to the south, breaking through Yugoslav lines, splitting the Yugoslavs from the Greeks and linking up with the Italians in Albania. Papagos therefore proposed the rapid abandonment of Northern Yugoslavia and especially of Croatia. (58)

It seems that Papagos found it quite "easy" to propose to the Yugoslavs that they abandon almost the two-thirds of their country and especially Croatia, which was already pro-German and unlikely to oppose the German attack. He might have argued exactly the opposite, that Croatia in particular should not be abandoned, just to make her feel secure and
protected and thus induce her to support the Allies, if there was such a chance. This would protect not only the rest of Yugoslavia, but his own country too. After all, when it came to withdrawing his forces from the north of Greece in order to facilitate the defence of the south, and the war effort of his Allies, very similar to what he proposed to the Yugoslavs, he was very stubborn in his reluctance to do so.

The Yugoslav answer to the Papagos proposal was that to abandon so much of national territory in which most of the principal war industries were located was something that could not be decided without prior consultation with the rest of the Yugoslav staff. Yankovic promised, however, that two first line divisions and two second line ones, would link up with the British, to attack the enemy on the right flank of his advance from Bulgaria. In Albania, where Papagos always stressed his zeal to clear up the situation, Yankovic said that three first line infantry divisions, reinforced by one second line division, after their mobilisation around 12th April, would commence offensive action against the Italians in Albania as Greek forces pushed the enemy from the south.(59)

The Yugoslav coup d'état in Belgrade led the British Government to undertake one final visit to Ankara to persuade the Turkish Government to assist the Allies and encourage the Yugoslav army to fight. Though it was known already that Turkey could not undertake any attack on behalf of the Allies due to its lack of military power, the British hoped, as before, to make Turkey to declare war on Germany, if the latter moved against Greece. The intention was to force Germany to divert forces to the Bulgaro-Turkish frontier and thus lighten the burden of the Allied defence in Greece. Turkey, as in the past, behaved rather negatively and would not commit herself.

On 4th April, Churchill sent a telegram to Wavell to tell him that Donovan's report had been welcomed in America and the British decision to aid Greece had been praised.(60)
Thus, at least in the U.S.A., where Britain particularly cared for her reputation, she was seen as acting ethically.

The British Expeditionary Force in Greece consisted of the following parts: a) the 1st British Armoured Brigade (of the 2nd British Armoured Division), including one regiment of Hussars with 52 9-ton tanks, one battalion of motorized infantry (Rangers) with 44 4-ton light tanks, a regiment of field artillery (24 75mm guns), a regiment of anti-tank artillery (24 47mm guns), an anti-aircraft artillery unit (12 40mm guns) and other miscellaneous formations; b) the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Division commanded by Major-General Bernard Freyberg with 3 infantry brigades (each of 3 battalions) and other units; and c) the 6th Australian Infantry Division commanded by Major-General I. Mackay, part of the 1st Australian Corps commanded by Lieutenant-General Thomas Blamey. The 2nd New Zealand Division was equipped, among others, with a regiment of 52 medium 14-ton tanks.(61)

De Guingand comments that: "if Greece had asked for assistance then we were in honour bound to do our best, but I contend we misled her as to our ability to help. We led her to believe that this help would be effective. The grounds for arriving at this view appeared extremely scanty."(62)

The R.A.F in Greece was composed of 80 serviceable aircraft organised as follows: a Western wing in support of the Greeks in Albania, with one bomber and one fighter squadron (Gladiators); and an Eastern wing, with two squadrons of bombers and one of Hurricanes in support of the Anglo-Greek forces against the Germans. One bomber and two fighter squadrons were based in Athens for her protection. It is needless to note that after the almost total annihilation of the Greek air force, the R.A.F. had an impossible task against overwhelming opposing forces.(63)

The B.E.F had been transported to Greece from Egypt via a series of ship movements. The operation was code-named "Lustre". The first contingent of the troops arrived in Piraeus
harbour early in March and the force was continuing to
disembark and take up positions as Germany struck Greece.
By 6th April, when Germany attacked Greece, 58 days supply
of food, 70 days of ordnance stocks and 38 days of petrol
and oil had been landed in Greece. (64) The 7th Australian
Infantry Division and the 1st Polish Independent Brigade,
though earmarked for Greece, never arrived. Erwin Rommel's
unexpected advance in Libya caused the British to retain
these two units in North Africa. It would have been
reasonable to expect that the Italians from the Dodecanese
and Southern Italy, and the German air force stationed in the
Mediterranean, would have tried, at least, to harass the
British flow of convoys to and from Greece.

However no such thing happened. The Italians were
generally very reluctant to oppose the British fleet in the
Mediterranean. It seems therefore, that it was under strong
German pressure at the Merano conference in February 1941,
to stop the British shipments to Greece, the Italians decided
to take the risks of a confrontation with the British fleet.
They sailed on a completely faulty German "assurance" that
the British had only one operational battleship in the
Mediterranean, the Valiant, since the other two, Warspite
and Barham, were out of action after a "successful" Luftwaffe
attack on them, and of a further German "reassurance" that
German bombers in Sicily would provide reconnaissance and
cover for the Italian battle fleet. (65)

It turned out to be a very grave mistake to rely on this
faulty German intelligence. The Italian naval armada found
itself confronted off Cape Matapan (Tainaro in Greek) by
three first line British battleships in a night action which
they did not expect, but above all for which they were not
trained. Moreover the Italians had their guns mounted fore
and aft. Within a few minutes, on 28th March, three Italian
heavy cruisers were destroyed at point blank range and two
destroyers were sent to the bottom as well. The British did
not have a single loss. The promised German air support was
not sighted at all, from the departure of the Italian fleet right up to the battle. See Maps 10, 12, 18, 19

Even the Italian flagship, the battleship *Vittorio Veneto*, suffered a torpedo hit. The Italian fleet was almost destroyed in the battle of Matapan. Not only did it not undertake any action against British shipping between Egypt and Greece but, even later on, it hesitated to confront British naval units and did not harass the later British evacuation from Greece. There were some unsuccessful Italian air attacks on British troops en route to Greece, but they caused no casualties.(66)

Let us investigate the battle of Matapan more closely. The analysis made by Greeks was that the sudden appearance of the Italian fleet in such force, in the Eastern Mediterranean, risking a major naval engagement with British and/or Greek ships was aimed at the destruction or, at least, the harassment of the British convoys from Egypt to Greece and vice-versa.

However, according to the testimony of an Italian officer picked up by the Greek destroyer *Hydra*, the major reason for the movement of the Italian fleet was not to attack British convoys. Apparently the Italians knew that Cunningham would interpret such an Italian move as an attempt to attack convoys, as he did, and would proceed to engage them. The Italians wished to draw Cunningham's force away from the North African shores and stall him, even at the risk of a battle, because the same night the battle of Matapan took place, strong Italian reinforcements were being transported to Libya.(67) Thus the Italians were not so keen on blocking British transports to Greece as on moving theirs to North Africa. They knew very well that if Cunningham's battle fleet remained in Alexandria or close to the Libyan coasts, there was the possibility that the Italian convoy would be discovered and of course attacked. By luring Cunningham away from the Libyan coasts and delaying his return, even by giving battle, they probably managed to
ship to Libya strong reinforcements without encountering the enemy presence. Of course the Italians could not have envisaged that their plan would have such a heavy cost for them.

An even more important issue concerns the participation of the Greek fleet. A Greek destroyer flotilla of seven ships was asked by Cunningham to participate in the battle. However due to a ciphering mistake in a signal from the British Naval Attaché in Athens to Cunningham, as the latter claims, the Greek destroyer flotilla did not take part in the battle except to pick up some Italian survivors. (68)

According to Phokas and the British Admiralty records, the despatch of the Greek destroyers took place at 1230 (British naval records show 1215) on 28th March. In other words, though the Greek Naval General Staff had ordered its ships to be ready on short notice from 27th March, to sail on Cunningham's orders, they sailed around noon the next day, after the Italian ships have been identified and after a small naval engagement had taken place between Italian and light British forces.

Phokas questions why it took the British Naval Attaché a whole day, from 27th March until noon on the 28th, to inform the Greek Naval Staff about Cunningham's intentions and course of action, when the Greek destroyers had been ready since 27th March and particularly since the Italian fleet was already identified and partially engaged. Since the Italian fleet was at sea, the Greek ships were ready, and the Italian fleet was partially engaged early on 28th March, the Greeks should have received Cunningham's instructions and sailed on 27th March, or at latest very early on the 28th. However the Greek ships sailed at noon on the 28th, still awaiting Cunningham's instructions via the British Naval Attaché in Athens. The delay, according to Phokas is unreasonable. Either Cunningham delayed in informing the British Naval Attaché of his intentions, or the latter delayed in conveying those intentions to the Greek Admiralty; or
possibly the Greek Naval Staff delayed in ordering its naval units to sail. (69)

Phokas indeed, argues that Cunningham delayed deliberately because of his reservations on the ability of the Greek fleet to coordinate with the British in battle. Phokas is not altogether critical of Cunningham for that, because there had been none of the prior Greco-British naval exercises which would have assisted in effective Allied action. In addition, there was no reliable communication system between Greek and British ships, thus making a common action virtually impossible, especially during a night engagement. Phokas then asks the question, why did Cunningham request the assistance of Greek ships if he had so many reservations about their fighting abilities that he was not going to use them anyway?. There is no rational answer. (70)

There is also another interesting point. Though the Greek flotilla sailed, as we saw above, with a considerable delay, it was ordered to reach a position south of Cephalonia island and there await further instructions from Cunningham via the attaché in Athens. However, the British Naval Attaché when informing Cunningham of the despatch of the Greek destroyers seems to have made a ciphering error. The word 'orders' was signalled to Cunningham as 'oiler'. The latter possibly believed that the Greek flotilla was awaiting for fuel and therefore did not inform them of his actions until 0350 on 29th March and as a result the Greeks did not participate in the battle.

In Cunningham's report to the Admiralty, in November 1941, published also in the London Gazette on 31st July 1947, the British Commander-in-Chief, says:

"The mistake which prevented the Greek destroyer flotilla taking part in the action was perhaps not unfortunate [author's emphasis] ....Nevertheless the presence of yet another detached force in the area, and that force one with which I could not readily communicate, would have seriously
added to the complexity of the situation. It was, however, disappointing for the Greeks." (71)

Phokas argues that the words "not unfortunate" imply an intentional aim of Cunningham not to use the Greek destroyers. Cunningham in his book, *A Sailors’ Odyssey* does not mention the above paragraph at all. He merely states that the Greek destroyers did not participate in the battle, due to a ciphering mistake. (72) The British Admiralty files include the part of the paragraph quoted above, from the word "Nevertheless" until "the Greeks". The same files state that the word 'orders' was received as 'oiler' (73), as if the mistake had taken place in deciphering the signal and not in ciphering it, as Cunningham claims both in his book, and in his report to the Admiralty. Moreover, the important first three lines which underscore the implication seem to have been added.

Vice-Admiral Evangelos Konstas argues that Cunningham did not intend deliberately not to use the Greek destroyers but that an unfortunate ciphering mistake had caused that. Nevertheless Konstas and Kavvadias seem to understand Cunningham’s anxiety about the use of the Greek destroyers in the battle, without their having a reliable communication system with the British forces. (74)

However the British Admiralty files show that though the mistaken signal was sent to Cunningham from the British Naval Attaché in Athens at 1215 on 28th March 1941, another telegram was sent to him at 2347 on the same day, informing him about the Greek Commander-in-Chief who awaited Cunningham’s orders. (75) This one was correct. Thus if Cunningham blames the mistaken signal to him at 1215, for the misunderstanding, he has no excuse for the right one later that day at 2347. Since he received two messages, the one wrong but the other right, he still had time, on the basis of the second message which was right, to order the Greek destroyers to assist him in the battle. All
that if he actually wanted the Greeks to assist him. The battle of Matapan took place at 2230 on 28th March. The correct message to Cunningham, from the British Naval Attaché in Athens concerning the Greek flotilla, was sent at 2347 on 28th March. Even though by 2347 the battle of Matapan was over, Cunningham could have ordered the Greek destroyers to block the escape route of the Italian fleet.

He does not do so, even knowing the exact position of the Greek ships. His first signal to the Greeks via the British Naval Attaché, comes at 0350 on 29th March, informing them that he would be glad if they could join him. Thus from 2347 on the 28th until 0350 on 29th March, Cunningham does not signal anything to the Greeks though throughout that time he must have kept informing the British Naval Attaché about his course of action and the battle. Additionally, Cunningham in his book, and in his report to the Admiralty, (November 1941) does not mention at all the existence of two telegrams, but only of the first, which was mistaken.

There may be more light to be shed on those matters. I have discovered that there is a file ADM 223/511 on the battle of Matapan at the Naval Historical Branch of the British Ministry of Defence, but it is to remain closed to researchers for many years. Possibly, this file contains the explanations for Cunningham's otherwise inexplicable actions.

Additionally, in the process of the Greek flotilla being despatched to the battle, one of the Greek destroyers, Aetos, seems to have been sabotaged so as either to exclude that particular ship from taking part in the battle or to delay the whole Greek force. P. Baloumis, an engineer officer of the Aetos, was accused by the rest of the crew of having deliberately sabotaged the cooling system of the destroyer, so as to cause its delay. It seems that Baloumis was afraid of battle. It should also be noted that according to Rear-Admiral Kavvadias' classified report to the Greek Navy General Staff (which is not mentioned in his book), he ordered an immediate investigation into the causes of the
It was revealed later, in April 1941, that the captain of *Aetos* prevented such an investigation because he had not wished to take part in the battle of Matapan either and, though it is not directly proven whether he actually assisted Baloumis in sabotaging the ship, he surely covered Baloumis' action. (76) The result was that *Aetos* was ordered to return to base, when the damage was discovered, but the remaining destroyers seem not to have been delayed due to that. Phokas verifies the fact that *Aetos* was forced to return to base, due to a mechanical problem in its cooling system, but he does not accuse anyone of causing the damage. (77)

Although it is not in the intention of this writer to devote significant time to intelligence, espionage and counter-intelligence, the following facts must be presented so that the reader will comprehend the conditions under which the Allies "hoped" to "beat" the Germans. The successful battle of Matapan was partly due to the accurate information that reached Cunningham in Alexandria after the decoding of the Italian naval codes. But that is not the issue here.

It must be remembered that though Greece had been at war with Italy since October 1940, she had not broken off diplomatic relations with Germany, even now that she was on the point of being invaded by her. At the same time, Greece maintained relations with all the Axis partners, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, etc. Thus the diplomats and military attachés of the Axis countries were allowed to stay in Athens and move about freely. The Metaxas regime which was still in power, with Koryzis as a Premier, was an authoritarian dictatorship, similar to Fascist regimes, if not Fascist itself.

The German Military Attaché, Major Clemm Hohenberg was, unfortunately for the Allies, half Scottish by birth, and spoke English fluently. He was seen many times in civilian clothing around the quays of Piraeus harbour, asking the unsuspecting British troops as they landed about their armament, strength, rations, provisions, etc. (78) At the
same time, Bulgarian diplomatic personnel could very easily visit the Hotel Grande-Bretagne which had been converted to the Headquarters of the Greek General Staff and take notes of anything that seemed interesting. All the information gathered was conveyed to Field Marshal List as he awaited to attack Greece. Meanwhile the Greeks allowed German agents to travel unhindered in all the military zones, which Greek personnel were not allowed to visit.

This ludicrous state of affairs had been going on since October 1940 and it intensified with the arrival of the B.E.F. in Athens. What seems especially ridiculous is that Wilson, who led the B.E.F in Greece, was forced to wear civilian clothes in order to fool the Germans. Even more humiliating was the Greek insistence that he was not even allowed to reconnoitre the area near the Aliakmon line, where the British would be deployed. Wilson was restricted in all his movements, he went about under the pseudonym Mr. Watt and was not given command of his troops until two days before the German invasion, and all that in order to escape from German espionage.

Even Freyberg on the eve of the German attack was not aware of the British order of battle. But if he had wanted to find out he would have had to do no more than simply ask Clemm Hohenberg, the German Military Attaché who must certainly have had a better idea. The British had come in Greece to assist a Fascist regime to fight another Fascist regime. It was not surprising that after all that successful German espionage in Greece, the enemy, as soon as he attacked, was able to control literally the entire telephone system and monitor every single telephone call.

Further evidence of German espionage in Greece was the use of the French School of Archaeology in Athens. The Vichy representative in Greece used the radio of the school to send information to the Japanese Consulate in Alexandria and from there to the Italians. But this device had been uncovered and all the archaeological schools in Athens closed.
Wilson describes the following incident: the German legation had a transmitter which used to operate at fixed hours. An attempt was made to destroy it by introducing a very high voltage into the normal electricity circuit. It was temporarily knocked out, only for it to be discovered that there was a second transmitter. An additional disappointment came to a dentist, who complained about that unorthodox procedure, since it took place while he was drilling a patient's tooth. (83)

Making an appraisal of the Allied strategy, we cannot fail to note many important flaws. First of all, the Greek strategy, or, better said, Papagos' strategy, was dominated by excessive reliance on the Yugoslav factor. Papagos expected to make his military dispositions and strategic plan, on the basis of the Belgrade attitude. That was a mistake, because it produced two things. On the one hand, vital, irreplaceable time was lost without any significant military arrangements being made. On the other hand, not only did the British fail (deliberately or not) to understand the importance of Yugoslavia's attitude to the Greek strategy, but when Yugoslavia deigned to inform Greece of its negative attitude, it was too late for Papagos to adapt to the new military situation.

Waiting for Yugoslavia to answer, had a value only if it was assumed that she would probably give a positive reply. In this case, there was not much hope. But Papagos still hung on to the Yugoslavian reply desperately, without trying to make alternative plans for the eventuality that Belgrade did not plan to assist the Allies. Thus, when Yugoslavia answered negatively and later on joined the Axis, Papagos was caught off guard, unable to design new strategic plans, simply because he had run out of time. From the start, he should have shown greater foresight, made allowance for the possibility of a negative reply or no reply at all, as it turned out to be, enabling him immediately to modify his plans according to planned alternatives.
Similarly, when the coup happened in Belgrade, Papagos pressed a case for taking all the troops in the north and forming a gigantic front from the Adriatic to the Black Sea with Turkish intervention as well. But this was totally unrealistic too, firstly, because there was no positive evidence that Turkey would collaborate with the Allies. On the contrary, the evidence so far indicated that Turkey was to remain neutral, ambivalent, and non-committal. Even more important, Turkey’s agreement with Bulgaria showed that the Allies could not expect anything from her but empty promises, as in the past, when she had on numerous occasions failed to implement her agreements with the French and the British, as well as with the Greeks.

But even if we are lenient, and give Papagos the benefit of the doubt and consider the best case analysis (the availability of Turkish support), the common front, from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, could still never have materialised. How could such a huge front be constructed and planned within the very few days that separated Greece from the German invasion? If such a scheme was to be envisaged, it needed months of diplomatic discussions and conferences and strategic evaluations and political consultation and military planning between Greece, Britain, Yugoslavia and Turkey. In the event the Allies had no more than ten days to accomplish all that with Yugoslavia confused and Turkey still uncertain. It was beyond all reason.

Thus the British objection to Papagos’ proposal to move all the troops in the Aliakmon line to the north of Greece, to form the common front, was a very wise objection. If such a move had taken place, almost the whole of the Allied force would have been cut off, captured and forced to surrender when the Germans attacked. In that case, the German campaign in Greece would have ended much quicker and with considerable losses for the Allies.

Similarly, the British strategy was mistaken too. The British side tended to be excessively concerned with the Turkish
attitude. They seemed to count on Turkish support, even after the Bulgaro-Turkish agreement, which must have indicated that Turkey had been lost. If the British wanted to induce Turkey to join the Allies, they should have done the same thing they did with Italy in the First World War. Since they were not willing to bribe Turkey, it was not surprising that they had no chance of persuading her to declare war on Germany, especially since Turkey had a record of defaulting on her obligations to the Allies.

Britain lost valuable time in discussing and re-discussing the possible assistance of Turkey, when she should have considered it a lost cause, as it was, and devoted all the time left in Greco-British talks to rectify the Allied misunderstanding of February 1941. Instead, the British pursued a futile time-wasting pro-Turkish policy even to the end. The time lost did considerable damage to both the Allies. On the other hand, Heywood's inactivity over the February 1941 misunderstanding cannot be ascribed to Britain as a whole as a blunder. It was a human error, but not a policy error, and it could have been averted if Eden had informed Papagos of Yugoslavia's negative attitude while he was in Ankara. But perhaps Eden had not grasped the significance of the Belgrade reply to Papagos.

If to all the above flaws, we add the fact that the Greek security system was indifferent and penetrated by German espionage, we can conclude that the Allied camp had no chance at all to beat the Germans, even if it had all the luck in the world.
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